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# MARTIN LUTHER: A DESTINY

BY

LUCIEN FEBVRE

PROFESSOR AT THE UNIVERSITY OF STRASSBURG

TRANSLATED BY ROBERTS TAPLEY

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First Edition

Fraternally Dedicated

To JULES BLOCH

## PREFACE

A biography of Luther? No. Nor yet an estimate. The plan has been rather to plot the curve of a destiny which was simple but tragic; to establish accurately the few genuinely important points through which it passed; to show how, under pressure of special circumstances, Luther had to abate somewhat his momentum and diverge from his earlier course; and thus finally to open up, with respect to this singularly forceful character, the basic question of history, the question, namely, of the relationship between the individual and the mass, between personal initiative and public necessity.

To attempt to fulfil this purpose in so short a book is to stand committed at the outset to enormous sacrifices. On this score one may hope to be judged with some leniency. It will not seem surprising certainly that, being compelled to choose, the author has favored in his study the Luther of the blossoming period, the Luther who from 1517 to 1525 played with so much power upon the world stage his heroic rôle of a prophet of God, even though this choice implied some slighting of the hypothetical Luther of the youthful period or the weary, exhausted, disillusioned and self-chastening Luther of the period from 1525 to 1546.

Need one add that in writing this book the author has

had but one end in view: to understand and, as far as he can, to promote understanding? He will be content, however,—and this doubtless expresses his purpose more accurately,—if the qualified exponents of Luther's thought recognize in this work of popularization, but also of analysis, one constant care, the wish to avoid such violent simplifications as would tend to destroy the richness of a life and achievement which were not merely melodic, but, after the fashion of the age, polyphonic and contrapuntal.

Sèvres, Le Bannetou, August, 1927.

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# PART ONE

## ISOLATION

Such information concerning the vast Lutheran bibliography as has seemed indispensable has been collected in a special note at the end of the book. In the footnotes *E.* refers to the Erlangen edition and *W.* to the Weimar edition of Luther's *Works*; *Dok.*, Scheel's collection, *Dokumente zu Luthers Entwicklung*; *End.*, the Enders edition of Luther's *Correspondence*; *D.-P.*, Denifle translated by Paquier; *Ströhl I* and *II*, M. H. Strohl's *Evolution de Luther jusqu' en 1515* and the *Epanouissement de Luther de 1515 à 1520* respectively; and *Will*, *La liberté Chrétienne* by R. Will. For all these works see the Bibliographical Note.

# CHAPTER I

## FROM THE LUTHER OF TRADITION TO THE LUTHER OF FATHER DENIFLE

ON the morning of July 17, 1505, a young layman crossed the threshold of the Augustinian monastery at Erfurt. He was twenty-two years old. His name was Martin Luther. Deaf to the representations of friends, who were already prophesying wealth and distinction for him in some secular career as the natural sequel to a promising début at the university, he was seeking a refuge in the cloister from the perils and evils of his day. The event was commonplace. It concerned ostensibly only the prospective monk, his immediate family, a few humble friends. It was nothing less, however, than the germ of the Lutheran Reformation.

It is true that Luther was one day to strip off and exchange for the furred gown of the professor the dress he now sought to assume, the rough woolen garb of the Augustinians. No doubt. But if he had never worn this habit, despised by the practical bourgeois, if he had not lived in the monastery almost fifteen years, if he had not acquired a first-hand and painful experience of monastic life, he would not have been Martin Luther. It is possible

by a jeu d'esprit to conceive an Erasmus who had chanced, or chosen, not to undergo the monastic experience at Steyn, or on the other hand to picture a Calvin placed by his family in a monastery. Would either have differed greatly from the Erasmus and Calvin we know? Whereas Luther, had he remained in the world and pursued his secular studies at the university and taken degrees in law, would have been anything but the Luther of history.

For Luther's novitiate is more than an incident. That he should have wished to be a monk, that he should have pursued that ambition for years with absorption—this fact marks the man ineffaceably and illumines his work. All of which is a help in explaining the prodigious accumulation of comment and mutually contradictory theory concerning this datum, namely, the entrance into a German monastery of a twenty-two-year old student on the morning of July 17, 1505.

## I

But that special interest is modern. For during three centuries historians of all shades, whether Catholic, Protestant or neutral, as though by a common conspiracy concentrated all their attention on the aspect, the doctrine, the achievement of the ripened figure who on October 31, 1517, stepped into the limelight and forced his compatriots to take sides once and for all either for or against him. Thus the best known portrait of Luther was one executed presumably around 1532, when Luther was fifty,

showing him as a learned doctor. Thus also the favorite subject both for friendly and hostile critics was the sectarian leader, the founder of a schismatic church, pronouncing on doctrinal questions from his pulpit at Wittenberg. Concerning his earlier years, the nature of his revelation, and how it had been delivered to him, no one cared to inquire.

It must be admitted, however, that there wasn't a great deal to go on. Absorbed as he was in the day-to-day struggle, Luther left but the sparsest outline of a history of his conscience and his internal life, a mere stolen glance, as it were, into retrospect thrown tardily over one shoulder. This brief reminiscence (it occurred some time in March, 1545) served as a preface to one of the volumes of the first edition of the *Works*.[1] Melanchthon added some few scant details in 1546, the year Luther died.[2] The most exigent scholars were accustomed to rest content with commenting upon these records along with some notes made by Amsdorf, Cochylaüs or Mylius. For seasoning they added some items from the *Table Talk*, an abundant but dubious source.

It will be remembered that, to the consternation of that thrifty housewife, Catherine von Bora, who had always an eye to profit[3] ("But, Reverend Doctor, do not teach them free gratis! They are jotting down no end of things!

[1] E., *op. var. arg.*, I, 15-24; *Dok.*, no. 8.

[2] Melanchthon's preface to *Tomus II omnium operum M. Lutheri*, Wittenberg, 1546, folio. Republished in *Corpus Reformat.*, *Melanchtonis Opera*, VI, 155-170; *Dok.*, no. 7.

[3] Luthers *Tischreden in der Mathesischen Sammlung*, Leipzig, 1903, p. 192, no. 232, Aug. 24, 1540; W., Tischreden, IV, 704, no. 5187.

Especially Lauterbach! Simply no end of things, and so profitably!"), a whole flock of worthy young fellows, sitting piously at the foot of the great table over which the master presided at Wittenberg, were eagerly writing down for posterity the words that came from his lips, the casual utterances of a man of lively imagination and hypersensitive feelings, who without the least guile was prone to romanticize the remoter past, gazing back upon it through the eyes of the present. Such utterances, revised, corrected, modified to accord with a pious editorial taste, comprised the official and often reprinted *Table Talk*. They were used without any sort of critical check—without reference even to the original notes, more candid and hence more useful, made by observers on the spot—in the shaping and constant reshaping of the half-legendary or hagiographic story of Luther's youth. This story was familiar to all the men of my generation. Our textbooks only epitomized, with greater or lesser inaccuracies, the vast monographs written by Köstlin, by Kolde, or, in French, by Félix Kuhn.

* * *

The piece, it must be admitted, had form and no end of drama.

First: the painful picture of a childhood without joy or beauty or love. Luther's birth occurred on Saint Martin's Eve, a November tenth, in 1483 presumably, in the little town of Eisleben in Thuringia. He returned there to die sixty-three years later. His parents were poor: the

father, a miner, hard toward his son and rough-mannered to others; the mother, an exhausted housewife sinking under the weight of her too heavy burdens, good for nothing except to pervert the mind of a rather susceptible child with prejudices and frightening superstitions. These joyless beings brought up little Martin among miners and merchants in the little village of Mansfield.

Beneath the ferule of clumsy, heavy-handed masters, the boy learned reading and writing, a little Latin and his prayers. Shouts and blows in his home and at school—a lot doubly hard for a nervous, sensitive child. At the age of fourteen, Martin set out for the great city of Magdeburg. He went there to seek more advanced schools among the Brethren of the Common Lot. But, lost as he was in this strange city, forced to beg bread from house to house, sick into the bargain, he was able to stay but one year. He returned momentarily to his father's house, then went to Eisenach, where he had some relatives. Abandoned by them, he encountered more hardships but fell in at last with some friendly souls, in particular a woman named Ursula Cotta, who surrounded him with an atmosphere of tender and delicate affection. Four years went by, the first mildly happy years of his comfortless youth. In 1501, in obedience still to his father, Luther set out for the thriving university of Erfurt.

There he worked with a feverish energy in the Faculty of Arts, became a bachelor in 1502 and a master in 1505. But the fate of his ill-starred youth still pursued him. He had several serious illnesses in rapid succession, met with

a serious accident, was plunged in the general horror of a murderous plague, and experienced the shock of being almost struck by lightning between Erfurt and Stotternheim. This whole series of violent events,[4] acting on his troubled mind and his overwrought sensibilities, drove the future heretic to adopt a course which would naturally suggest itself after such experiences to one of his temperament. Renouncing his secular studies and the prospect of social advancement which his family already envisaged for him, he set off to sue for admission at the gate of the Erfurt Augustinians.

* * *

This ends the first act. In the second the scene shifts to the monastery.

Having chosen to be a monk, Luther submitted willingly to the rigors of the monastic régime. And what rigors! Between 1530 and 1546 he denounced their fruitless cruelty at least twenty times.[5] "Yes, I was a perfect picture of monastic piety. And so strictly faithful to the rules, I may say, that if ever a monk got to heaven by monastic observances, I should surely have done so. Except that the thing would have dragged out a while yet: I should have died of vigils, prayers, pious studies and other works." [6] And elsewhere: "For twenty years I was a pious

[4] Of course, we have included none of these in our account.

[5] For a good example see Strohl I, 78-79.

[6] For this text and the two following, cf. E., *Polit. d. Schr.*, XXXI, 273 (1533) and *Dok.*, No. 61.—E., *Exeget. d. Schr.*, XLIX, 300 (1537) and *Dok.*, No. 46.—E., *op. exeg. lat.*, VII, 72 (1540-1542) and *Dok.*, No. 18.

monk. I said a mass every day. I exhausted myself so with prayers and fasts that I wouldn't have held out much longer if I had remained." And again: "If Christ had not comforted and delivered me by means of the gospel I should not have lived two years more, I had so far crucified myself in the hope of escaping the wrath of God. . . ."

But why all these penances? To comply with an absurd ideal, but the only ideal his church indicated to Luther. The whole teaching to which he was subject,—this ardent monk who had fled to a monastery to find God there, the living God, and a God who had also sought refuge there from a perverse generation,—the doctrine that Luther derived from the fountainhead of all Christian living, the books of the fathers of the church, everything, right down to the works of art in the chapels and the carvings about the church porches, spoke to him of a dreadful, implacable, vengeful God, keeping strict account of everyone's sins in order to bring them up one day to the terror of the wretches who were doomed to expiate them. An atrocious, inhuman and desperate doctrine. And what sorry fare for a sensitive spirit, full of tender affection and love! "I did not believe in Christ," wrote Luther in 1537, "but I thought of Him as a severe and terrible judge, as the painters have shown Him, enthroned on the rainbow." [7] And, in 1539: "How the name of Jesus would frighten me often! I would have preferred to hear Satan's instead, for I was convinced that I had to accomplish good works until

[7] For this and the following texts, cf. E., *Exeg. d. Schr.*, XLIX, 27 (1537) and *Dok.*, No. 45. E., *Exeg. d. Schr.*, XLV. p. 156 (1539) and *Dok.*, No. 27.

Christ should relent and become well-disposed toward me."

Thus, although he had entered the cloister to find peace and the certitude of salvation, he found only terror and doubt. It was vain, in order to appease the wrath of a petulant God, for Luther to double his penances, mortifying body and soul. It was vain to attempt to extort from heaven the happy assurance by fasts, vigils and exposure, *Fasten*, *Wachen*, *Frieren*, the sinister trinity, whose names are a dreary chorus to all these disclosures. After each superhuman ordeal of mortification, after every uneasy flare-up of hope, there was always the relapse, each time more lamentable, into blank despair. The unhappy youngster from Mansfield by becoming an Augustinian had only deepened his doubt of his own salvation. In a Christendom that was deaf to the impulses of the heart, whose temples were thronged with money-changers, whose sheep were ill-shepherded, whose disciples were ill-instructed, no attention was paid to the anguish of one crying out for the living faith, one who asked for bread and was given only a stone; he heard only the answering sobs of his fellows in suffering.

Then a man came, a mystic with a compassionate heart. Doctor Staupitz, vicar-general of the Augustinians after 1503, won the young man's confidence and ministered to his sick conscience. He preached to him first of all a God of love of pity and pardon. But, more, in order to spare him vain agonies, he spurred him to action. In 1502 the Elector Frederick the Wise had founded a university

at Wittenberg. Staupitz held a professorship. In the autumn of 1508 he summoned Luther and committed to him a course in the ethics of Aristotle, advising him simultaneously to pursue divinity under the theological faculty. Though recalled to Erfurt the following year, Luther there continued his teaching and study; he obtained the degree of bachelor of theology in 1510, made a commentary on Peter Lombard, and became a successful teacher. His fits of melancholy grew rarer. He had found salvation, it seemed. But a new turn in the play set him back at the start again.

## II

At the end of 1510, Brother Martin Luther went to Rome in the interests of the order. An immense hope exalted him. He was going, a pious pilgrim, to the chief shrine of Christian pilgrims, the Rome of the martyrs, the living heart of all Christendom, the homeland of all the faithful, the august seat of the vicar of God. And he found . . . ? The Rome of the Borgias, which had lately become the Rome of Pope Julius.

When, fleeing in horror from this cursed Babylon, its courtiers, its bravos, its ruffians, its simonaical clergy, its cardinals deficient alike in faith and morality, Luther got back to his native Germany, he carried in his heart an inexhaustible hatred for the Scarlet Woman. The very abuses that Christendom with one voice condemned he had seen actively and unblushingly living and thriving in the

clear Roman sunlight. But he knew their origin. In the monastery, from 1505 to 1510, he had had a chance to observe the decay of Christian instruction. In the depths of his sensitive soul he had experienced the desiccating poverty of the doctrine of works. At Rome, in 1510, the hideous moral corruption of the church was revealed in its nakedness. The Reform was as good as accomplished—the cloister and Rome had by 1511 made Luther a Lutheran.

* * *

Yet Luther still held his peace. A dutiful child of the faith, his filial piety constrained him to seek to conceal a scandal that was only too plainly manifest. Without a murmur he took up again his life of meditation, of prayer, of instruction, of preaching. Staupitz continued to sponsor him. Intending to surrender to Luther his chair at the university, Staupitz made him sub-prior of the Augustinians at Wittenberg and urged him to come up for his degree in theology on October 4, 1512. Coming into his doctorate on the nineteenth, Luther entered upon professorial duties that were to occupy him for almost thirty years by offering two courses, one on the *Psalms* (1513-1515), the other on the *Epistle to the Romans* (1515-1516).

Only then did he start to break cramping bonds and to forge for himself a personal theology. How and wherefore? The former historians didn't bother to ask. There is not a line in the first two hundred pages of Kuhn's book concerning the progress of Luther's religious ideas between 1505 and 1517, and when the question of indul-

gences crops up, his readers are entirely ignorant still of the already well defined feeling that inspired the reformer. Kuhn's models, the German historians of his generation, are content with a reference to the 1545 reminiscence that we cited above. An old man, on the brink of the grave at the time, Luther offers there a distorted view of the course of his evolution. In a well-known passage that formerly no one dreamed of attacking, he reveals the torment into which he was thrown by a sentence of Saint Paul in the *Epistle to the Romans*: *"Justitia Dei revelatur in illo*— Therein (in the Gospel) is the justice of God revealed." [8]

God's justice? The justice doubtless of an inexorable judge, inaccessible to all weakness or compromise, who weighs with a terrifying impartiality the lives and the actions of men hailed before his tribunal. But would not such justice be a cruelty? Would it not of necessity doom His own creation to death and eternal chastisement? How was sinful man to show himself other than evil? How was such a weakling, unaided, to perform meritorious actions? Must not Luther have inwardly raged at a God who even in that very gospel in which he announced the "glad tidings" had the air of threatening his creatures with the fearful instruments of his wrathful justice? At least till the day when light burst upon him and the monk understood that the justice of which Saint Paul spoke, the justice which the Gospel reveals to man, was "the justice which the just attain by the grace of God, if they have

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[8] E., *op. var. arg.*, I, 15; *Dok.*, No. 8, 16-17; Strohl I, 140.

faith," the passive justice of the theologians, "that through which, in His mercy, God justifies us by faith, according as it is written: The just shall live by faith."

Without taking the trouble to look into these dubious formulæ, without asking whether, in 1545 at the age of sixty, Luther's mind reproduced with exactitude the intimate spiritual phases of the monk of thirty, the historians accepted the reformer's own conclusion: "I felt myself suddenly born again. The doors were flung wide. I entered Paradise. The whole Scripture took on a new aspect for me." This revelation they hailed without more ado as the fertile germ of a future church.

* * *

Precisely in 1517, while Luther was with difficulty restraining himself and keeping his vocal thunders pent up in his breast, a hideous scandal broke out. Indulgences, conceded by the Pope to a young man of twenty-three, Albert of Brandenburg, who in less than two years had succeeded to the dignities of Archbishop of Magdeburg, Bishop of Halberstadt and Archbishop of Mainz, were preached and sold with a cynicism so blasphemous that, faced with this hateful traffic, faced with the affirmation, which a host of traders in clerical garb were busy disseminating to hundreds of thousands, that even the most heinous sins could be wiped out with money, Luther unleashed at last the tumult of an indignation he had too long contained.

From one end to the other of a Germany saturated

with abuses, disheartened by ignominies, and weary of scandals—a Germany, however, where the Reuchlin affair and some others had already served to range the free spirits against atavistic barbarism and the obscurantism, intellectual and moral, of the scholastics—his hot words rang furiously. They evoked a formidable echo. In some days, or some weeks, the insurgent Augustinian was a power. He took up and brought to a whirlwind conclusion the abortive work of the great reformative councils. He took up also and put into effect the program of those clear-sighted but timid intellectuals who had hitherto drawn their inspiration from men like Erasmus and who were pretending, by a beneficent study and practice of humanistic literature, to free the élite from a barbarous subjection to a degenerate scholastic theology. Joining forces with Ulrich von Hütten, Luther preached, before recusant throngs, the phenomenal *joie de vivre* of an age in which the Renaissance and the Reformation mingled. His song of triumph and of liberation was flung out at random to a whole re-echoing Europe, which seemed to awake at the sound and to rise from among the dead. In vain did the Pope and the Emperor, failing lights in a shaken world, try to cow the poor monk who had threatened their secular power. What Luther proclaimed at the Diet of Worms on Thursday, April 18, 1521, in the face of the German Cæsar and the Papal Legate, while a crowd overflowing the vast hall of audience blew its hot breath upon him—what Luther then proclaimed in a voice that his torment made yet more pathetic

was not merely the overthrow of an usurping and degenerate Papacy, but something greater and better, the imprescriptible rights of the individual conscience. "Retract one jot I neither can nor will . . . for to gainsay one's conscience is neither safe nor honest."

Immortal words. Elevating himself to the stature of all humanity, even more irresistible for the fact that his spirit quailed and his flesh trembled in the very hour when his words took flight to strike with unerring aim the coalesced powers of the mediæval past, this poor monk in his hempen garments, overcome at the first by the pomp and circumstance of a princely assembly, became, from the viewpoint of centuries, the magnificent herald of the modern era.

He achieved, in the act of proclaiming it, his incomparable human dignity.

III

This spirited story, full of life and drama, was in perfect agreement with all that was formerly said about the origins and the causes of the Protestant Reformation. Had it not been born of the abuses in the church which were often denounced in the fifteenth century but which daily grew worse and worse? The material abuses: simony, the traffic in benefices and indulgences, the irregular conduct of priests, the speedy decay of monastic institutions? The moral abuses: the wretched decadence of a theology which reduced the living faith to a system of empty observances? Abruptly, the edifice crumbled; all fell into

confusion and chaos at the touch of one man. And it took twenty years to make the adjustments contingent upon such a revolution.

Father Henri Suso Denifle, O. P., sub-archivist of the Holy See, was a scholar well known in learned society in the later years of the nineteenth century. In the course of a relatively short life (he was destined to die in 1905 at the age of sixty-one) this Tyrolese Belgian abundantly gratified in a dozen ways a voracious hunger for knowledge.

He had gone in at first for mystical theology and had undertaken a critical edition of the works of Henri Suso, not to mention Tauler or Master Eckhart. Then he had taken up the mediæval universities; it is general knowledge how, with the aid of Emile Chatelain he assured the publication of a primary landmark in our intellectual history, the Cartulary of the University of Paris. Finally, after plundering the records of petitions in the Vatican, he collected and published a profusion of documents relating to the devastation of churches, monasteries and almonries in France in the course of the Hundred Years War. Pacific and honorable labors. The Academy of Inscriptions had conceded their merits by inscribing the name of Father Denifle on its lists. And the sub-archivist of the Vatican appeared to be committed for the remnant of his days to such innocent tasks of mediæval scholarship.

Then in 1904 at Mainz the peaceful course of Lutheran researches was interrupted by a thunderbolt of a different

sort from the thunderbolt that just missed striking Luther on the way to Stotternheim. The first volume appeared, signed with Father Denifle's name, of a work called *Luther and Lutheranism*. In a month it was out of print.[9] Lutheran Germany shook with wrath and with secret pain. A portion of Catholic Germany, alarmed on the score of political expediency, raised its arms to heaven in an indeterminate gesture of disapproval. The reviews, the newspapers, all the periodicals of a country rich in printed matter, spoke of only one subject. And in public assemblies governments were interpellated on the subject of a frightful and positively blasphemous book.

* * *

Ardent and convinced Dominican as he was, Father Denifle had undertaken, in the course of his study of the French monasteries in the fifteenth century, to determine the causes of their undeniable decadence. His pursuit of this research down through the centuries had brought him into collision with the Lutheran Reformation. Was he going to quit the field, admit his incompetence, confess himself beaten? Surrender? That was simply not one of his habits. Countless scholars, from Preger to Jundt and M. Fournier had been forced to recognize the crude vigor of what the combative monastic himself described as his "Tyrolean candor." And as for his seeming incompetence, that was precisely the source of his power and the thing that made him at first irresistible.

[9] See Bibliographical Note.

As a mediævalist he had long been thoroughly versed in mediæval theology. Though he liked best the mystics, he had nevertheless acquainted himself also with the others, the doctors of the twelfth and the thirteenth centuries. The scholars of the Lutheran church, on the other hand, had no such extensive culture. They had turned their backs especially on all that background that Father Denifle knew so well. And naturally an almost complete ignorance of the thought and teaching that had been Luther's fare as an Augustinian, his point of departure, wasn't likely to help their interpretation of Luther's ideas. Whereas Father Denifle, on the other hand, in his quality of Catholic and monastic, acquainted as he was at first hand with the life and routine of the monastery, had in this respect an advantage over German Lutheran pundits, which made itself keenly felt from the very first chapter. The wisest made haste to plead guilty. And as for the others—on a score of academic and professorial shoulders the birch rod executed its merry tattoo. Even now, in spite of the softening touch of Father Weiss, who completed the work, and of M. Paquier, who translated and pruned it, enough of the primal quality remains in the footnotes to enable the connoisseur to recognize Father Denifle's rare skill in polemical pearl diving.

* * *

But these are the merest side issues. What was Father Denifle's real purpose?

First of all—and this was the plainest motive—to

give Luther a black eye. To damage Luther the man. To knock him down from his undeserved pedestal. To put in the place of the lying effigy of a demigod—or, to speak more accurately, of a pink-cheeked, curly haired, soft spoken, fatherly saint—a picture drawn from life of a man full of talent and of rare endowments—"I have never denied," said Denifle, "that Luther was richly endowed" [10]—but full also of vulgar faults, of baseness, of mediocrity. The defects no doubt would have been pardonable in a scholar, a jurist, a statesman. But were they excusable in a founder of a religion? Denifle grew implacable, seized any weapon that came to hand from an arsenal that was only too well provided, Luther's promiscuity, his intemperance, his use of obscenity, his lies and his vices; one followed another in a series of paragraphs animated by holy, exalting anger. Moreover he was armed to the teeth with evidence. His inferences might be libellous, monstrous, insane. They might be presented with an air of such undisguised hatred as to cause even the most uncritical reader to suspect foul play. But to balance all that and, besides, to complete the exasperation of those dutiful sons of the Reformer who were disposed, like the son of Noah, to hide Luther's nakedness under a cloak of decency, there remained a great mass of highly embarrassing documents.

The upshot, however, it must be admitted, was meagre. Whether Luther drank more or less Rhenish wine or Wit-

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[10] D.-P., I, LXX.

tenberg beer, or embraced his wife Catherine over ardently, or applied excessively foul abuse to the Pope, to his deputies, to the monks—these were matters of small importance, when all is said, mere incidents in the general history of the German Reformation. The official Lutheran apologists, however, were seized with panic and insisted on quibbling over minutiæ instead of erecting, as against all the travestied Luthers (the saccharine Luther *für das Christliche Haus* on the one hand, and the monster Denifle had evoked), a thoroughly human Luther with faults and virtues, with great and ignoble qualities, inexcusably vulgar, inestimably sublime, a Luther of subtle shades, vital, full of contrasts and contradictions. And this quibbling of theirs was what gave people pause and served to prolong the uncertainty.

This, however, was not really what made *Luther and Lutheranism* significant. There was something else in the book besides unkind inferences and incontestible evidence. There was something quite different, a new way of conceiving and expounding the origin of Luther's ideas, *i. e.*, his religious development from 1505 to 1520 approximately.

* * *

It should be understood that in 1899 a Professor Ficker of the University of Strassburg discovered in Rome a particularly precious document, a stray from the Heidelberg *Palatina* that was taken to Rome at the time of the Thirty Years War, the *Cod. Palat. lat.* 1826 of the Vatican collec-

tion. It was Aurifaber's record (Johann Goldschmiedt, Luther's last *famulus*, the first editor of the *Table Talk*) of the theretofore unknown lectures on the *Epistle to the Romans* that Luther gave at Wittenberg in 1515 and 1516. Ficker had, soon after, the added surprise of discovering Luther's own original manuscript reposing peacefully in the Berlin Library.

A choice morsel, clearly. It conduced to a detailed knowledge of Luther's thoughts at a period of paramount interest, the very eve of the scandal about indulgences. Hitherto the available texts pertaining to Luther for the years 1505-1517 were extremely inadequate. A few dry marginal notes on various authors, Peter Lombard, Saint Augustine, Saint Anselm, Tauler; some *Dictata super psalterium* (notes on the Psalms), 1513-1516, the work of a groping novice; some sermons, a very few letters: that was all. The lectures of 1515-1516 were a rich and important work. Beyond the intrinsic value of Luther's comments, special interest attaches to the text upon which the comments were made, the Epistle to the Romans, in view of the rôle it was destined to play in the pending Reformation. In short, it was going to be possible for the first time in history to make a reliable study on the basis of a text only slightly antedating the crucial events of 1517-1520.

Frequenting the Vatican, Father Denifle was naturally informed of Ficker's discoveries. He studied the *Palatinus* 1826 for himself. He drew from it no end of citations and argument, with which to season his discussion. And from

this his study of Luther's development from 1505 to 1517 derived, in spite of its unrestraint and its injudicious violence, a particular interest and prestige.

## IV

Denifle laid down one principle. "Hitherto our views about Luther's life prior to his heresy have been mainly based on his own *ex post facto* statements. The first task then is to examine these statements critically." A sound and unassailable argument. But what precisely did Luther's own story amount to? First, he attacked the teachings of the church in his day. Secondly, he explained how he came to disassociate himself from that teaching. An attack and a justification.

What about his attack? Luther's story of what was imposed on him as a monk in his cloister was a tissue of errors, inventions and calumnies. No, there was not one accurate detail in the whole ridiculous picture. He painted the canvas with a view to making his own teachings stand out as a high light against the most sombre of backgrounds. Denifle took up the heretic's assertions one by one, challenged them, wrestled with them, destroyed them.

That tale for example of the Bible being unknown in the monasteries, a celebrated bit gleaned by Lauterbach,[11] with its naïve introduction: "22 *Feb*: *dicebat de insigni et*

[11] Seidemann, A. *Lauterbachs Tagebuch*, 1872, 36; W., *Tischreden*, III, 598, No. 3767; *Dok.*, no. 41.

*horrenda cœcitate papistarum*—February twenty-second: the doctor spoke of the extraordinary, the frightful blindness of the papists." Extraordinary and frightful indeed; these papists were ignorant of nothing forsooth but the Bible; *erat omnibus incognita.* At the age of twenty Luther had not yet seen a Bible. By chance he discovered one in a library, and began to read and reread it absorbedly to the wonder of Dr. Staupitz. Indeed! But, Father Denifle protested, the first book that Luther received from the hands of his Prior on entering the Augustinian monastery at Erfurt was precisely a Bible, a big Bible bound in red leather! Luther says so himself expressly: "*Ubi monachi mihi dederunt biblia, rebeo corio tecta.*" [12] These papists at least seemed to know that the Bible existed.

That tale also about a petulant deity, a God of anger and vengeance, the "God enthroned on the rainbow," as the painters and sculptors showed him on the Judgment Day, the prodigious incorruptible judge who was armed with the record of all our deficiencies? All lies. Twenty times a day Brother Martin in reciting his prayers, in reading his breviary, was bound to invoke the God of clemency, the God of pity and compassion as the Church really pictures him: "*Deus, qui sperantibus in te misereri potius eligis quam irasci.*" [13]

As for the mortifications, the fasts, the penances so severe that Luther, in undergoing them in conformity to the monastic rules nearly ruined his health, not to men-

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[12] N. Ericeus, *Sylvula Sententiarum*, 1566, p. 174; *Dok.*, no. 76.
[13] D.-P., II, p. 327-363.

tion the jeopardy of his soul through the false hopes held out by the church to those who obeyed her behests, what could be more absurd? First of all one can't have it both ways. If the heads of monasteries around 1510 drove their monks into penitential excesses such as Luther complained of, let there be an end of the accusation that these monks were lax, sensual, and unbridled. There was nothing extreme about the monastic discipline in general or about the Augustinian discipline in particular. Moreover, exemptions and special indulgences were allowed in the case of monks who were not robust or from whom great mental activity was expected. And as for the motive urged for these mortifications and the Church's teaching on that point? Again and again Luther says: "They urged them upon us as being, by their very excess, our means of salvation." An unblushing lie. If he had really believed that, Martin Luther would have been no better than a fool. He could never have believed it. In a score of places in his own early writings he himself taught the right, the authentic, the only doctrine of the Church on the subject of penances: used discreetly they are simply a way of subduing the flesh, of mortifying sinful desires, of checking the old Adam.[14]

All of which shows that Luther misrepresented. And as for his neophytes, the credulous horde who swear by the master without the least effort at criticism, let us make an end of their folly. "First they misrepresent the Catholic

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[14] D.-P., II, p. 284-292.

doctrine and then they denounce it." On such themes Father Denifle was tireless. And his crushing force had at least the effect of bringing to light astonishing blunders on the part of the Lutheran doctors, difficulties that had to be dealt with.

* * *

So much then for Luther's attack. Now for his justification. A travesty of the facts, a story made up *ex post facto* to fortify him in his apostasy with all sorts of specious arguments. Here also Denifle proceeded to deal without gloves.

The reader will recollect from our earlier transcript the famous autobiographic passage of the year 1545. A pure fairy story, said Father Denifle. Was it true that the Catholic doctors understood by *justitia*, in the famous passage from the Epistle to the Romans (I. XVII.) the *justitia puniens*, the wrath of a vengeful God? Very well, it remained for Denifle to pass in review the commentaries of sixty Catholic writers of the highest standing from the fourth to the sixteenth century. Not one had conceived that *justitia* implied retribution. All without exception had conceived it to be the justice by which we are justified, the justifying and freely accorded grace, a true justification by faith. Now, of these sixty writers there were several that Luther had undeniably known and made use of. There were St. Augustine, St. Bernard, Nicolas of Lyra, Lefèvre d'Étaples. As far back as we are able to trace Luther's thought, Luther himself took *justitia* to mean not a puni-

tive justice but the justifying grace of God [15] (for example his notes on the *Sententiæ* of Peter Lombard).

Then why these misrepresentations of Luther's on the eve of his death? Because the author of the Reformation was unwilling to confess the truth. Because he was eager to disguise the way his thought had really evolved.

Two men really dwelt in Luther, a proud man and a carnal. The proud man, scorning all sound doctrine, had fostered the mad illusion that he might win salvation unaided. Many others before him had entertained this illusion, other Christians and other monks, but in that respect bad monks and bad Christians who had missed the very essence of their religion. Luther knew that. In a letter to a confrère,[16] April 8, 1516, he denounces those presumptuous folk who flatter themselves they shall stand fortified and resplendent before God's throne by virtue of their good works. But if our own efforts and penances sufficed to bring peace to our consciences, to what end did Christ die? *ut quid ille mortuus est*? Actually the proud man in Luther came into collision with the carnal, a poor vacillating, weak-willed creature, the sport of his instincts, devoid of true delicacy, a man nourishing in his heart like a cancerous growth a lust that was his despair.

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Concupiscence—the church is not ignorant of that conception. It knows that underlying our human nature is an

[15] D.-P., II, p. 366.
[16] Enders, I, no. 11, p. 29.

ever ebullient fountain of evil and inordinate desires. The practice of virtue consists precisely in forcing one's self to master this concupiscence, in subjecting it to the spirit, which in turn is subject to God, in preventing the evil desires, in a word, from getting the upper hand and conducing to sin. But Luther erred on the subject of concupiscence.[17] To begin with he thought that he could extirpate it by practising the virtues. He naturally failed. So far from diminishing, his concupiscence increased beyond measure and became so irresistible that he gave up the battle and yielded everything. Sin, he said is invincible. It is absolute—the original sin, the depravity which, do what we may, survives in us. And since it has its effect on all our acts, including even the best of them, all our good works are tainted by it. In all, underlying all, is sin, the sin of sins. Therefore man cannot attain merit or fulfil the Law. The Gospel is not the Law: it is only the promise of pardon for sins. It enunciates one commandment alone but one that says everything: "Accept God's word and believe in Him."

What a burst of light! That is really the starting place of a Luther. Whatever else he has said, however contradictory, concerning God's passive or active justice is only a poor pretense devised to conceal the fact, and to save the Father of the Reformation the embarrassment of confessing, the real occasion of his apostasy, the sorry predicament, namely, of a soul so evilly disposed, so wholly a prey of

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[17] D.-P., II, p. 381; 391-407.

concupiscence that, confessing defeat, it threw down its weapons and evolved a new system of thought from its own undoing.

## CHAPTER II

### THE UPSHOT. LUTHER BEFORE THE ILLUMINATION

CONFRONTED with the violent attacks of Father Denifle, the direct personal challenge implied in his book by his sarcasms on their ideas and their attitudes, the defenders of the Lutheran fortress at first merely raged and stormed. Then they fell to work with a will.

The ground all about them was completely littered with débris, the ruins of the noble edifice which they had reared with such loving effort. While they hated the intellectual structure which stood in its place, they were nevertheless impressed by the hardihood of its logic. Change was now in the very air that they breathed. The ferment occasioned by the publication of *Luther and Lutheranism* had not yet subsided. A man of great talent, a Protestant theologian named Ernest Troeltsch, was beginning in a series of works to express views which resembled and sometimes rather strangely corroborated certain of Denifle's views.[1]

After all was it really the Reformation which signalized, back in the sixteenth century, the advent of the modern era? Was the heroic and spectral gynecologist who pre-

[1] See bibliography.

sided at the birth of our modern world really Luther? How actually, by what very gradual process, did the slowly compacted mass of our new and modern ideas come about? Are we right in scoring it to the credit of early Protestantism? Did it really derive from this early Protestantism? that of Luther and Calvin, or from a whole succession of religious and intellectual movements—Humanism, Anabaptism, Arminianism, Socianism—which testify eloquently to the fecundity of the sectarian spirit? Finally, did the modern world really break loose decisively from the mediæval till about the middle actually of the *eighteenth* century?

On all sides men's minds were taken up with such problems. A tremendous task of revision, nay rather of reconstruction, appeared unavoidable. To begin with, how substantial were Denifle's bricks and mortar? And might not some use yet be found for the stones that he had rejected?

The cards were shuffled again. A whole eager and laborious Germany fell to with a species of self-contained fury. And indeed German thoroughness produced some amusing extravagances. One man undertook to prove beyond the peradventure of a doubt that Luther was a virgin on the day that he married Catherine. Another with inexhaustible patience compiled statistics from existing records on the basis of which he essayed to determine almost to the glass the amount of wine and of beer that Luther, unjustly denounced as a winebibber, might conceivably have imbibed in the course of his many years.

Laugh who will. The outlay of effort was none the less admirable. And when it was over,—when, in spite of the war, German Lutherans celebrated in 1917 the four hundredth anniversary of the events of 1517,—the first and second volumes of *Martin Luther* (*Vom Katholizismus zur Reformation*) by Otto Scheel bore eloquent testimony to the value of the vast and distinguished work of revision that had been going on since 1904 and has since continued. Let us try to note the principal gains made.

## I

Luther's life in the limited sense, from his birth to his religious conversion, has been, as might be anticipated, subjected to copious study. The reason is obvious. There was need to revise the lurid accounts of the older biographies. No, Luther's parents were not in fact so poor as all that; his father wound up in the pink of prosperity, a well-fed contractor. No, the boy suffered no such serious hardships as has been pretended; there is no need for shedding tears at the spectacle of a youthful Martin going into the streets to sing for his supper. All this is in fact unauthentic and scarcely relevant. Likely guesses, personal impressions, often fabrications expressive of some particular bias. Nor is it desirable either to attach much importance to the interminable disquisitions on Luther's entry into the monastery. As though anyone could account for the feelings that Luther experienced on that day when a lightning bolt just missed striking the modern but rather chimerical

St. Alexis. Or discover whether, when the Master of Arts of Erfurt went into the monastery, he was acting upon some vow. Or determine why,—for what reasons and influenced by what secret motives,—if he ever took such a vow (which is not at all evident) but was able to be released from it (a circumstance even more dubious), he chose rather to be bound and to adhere to his extravagant purpose.

It is something to know one's self ignorant. Let us rest content with that virtue. And, dismissing all these conjectures, which are only conjectures, all choice of alternatives which would be at the best but a choice of engaging hypotheses, let us bring our energies to bear upon the essential problem. Let us frankly abandon the effort to reconstruct Luther's early surroundings; their effect on his ideas and sentiments could never be estimated. Let us merely inquire whether it is now possible to arrive at a plausible theory with regard to the moral and spiritual aspects of Luther's monastic life. A *plausible* theory. Because clearly any pretense of certainty would be a dishonesty.

* * *

There is in the *Resolutiones*, written in 1518 by way of explaining to the Pope, and more especially to the general public the real significance of the theses on Indulgences,[2] a passage in which, after calling Tauler to witness to the moral tortures which the most ardent Christians are capable of enduring, Luther wrote, alluding obviously to

[2] W., I, 557; *Dok.*, No. 94.

his own experience: "I also have known very intimately a man who declared he had often suffered such anguish. Not for protracted intervals, to be sure! But the tortures were so terrible, so infernal, that no tongue or pen could describe them. Only one who has experienced them can imagine them. If one should be forced to endure them to the end, if they were to be prolonged but a half hour,—nay, a tenth of an hour would suffice,—one would be completely destroyed; one's bones even would be reduced to an ash." Then, striving to be more explicit: "At such times as that God seems to be terribly angry and the whole of creation wears a hostile expression. There is no escape, no possible consolation. Within and without you encounter only hatred and accusation. And in your affliction the words *Prospectus sum a facie oculorum tuorum*! are wrung from you with a sob, but you dare not so much as to murmur: *Domine, ne in furore tuo arguas me*!"

The man who expressed himself in these terms in 1518 —the man whom Melanchthon, speaking from personal recollection, describes as being obliged, in the course of a disputation to withdraw to the next room and fling himself on the bed in a paroxysm of passionate supplication crying: *Conclusit omnes sub peccatum, ut omnium misereatur* [3]—this man, who insisted a hundred times that in youth he had undergone the most cruel and exhausting psychic upheavals, was certainly not a performer of lip service only or one whose faith could be kept tractably

[3] *Corpus Reformatorum* (*Melanthonis Op.*), t. VI, col. 158; *Dok.*, No. 7, p. 8.

within the limits of one little corner of his mind and his heart. But what caused these seizures?

It is best to exclude, if we may, explanations of a physiological nature. The time for them is not ripe. It will come, no doubt. It is better also to admire without emulating these psychiatrists pro tem who pronounce contradictory diagnoses of Luther's malady with such a grand air of assurance. It is better even to hold out against the seductions of the psychoanalysts for whose taste no theory is too facile; the Freudian idea about the libido and about inhibitions accords all too aptly with Father Denifle's allegation about Luther's secret vices. A Freudian Luther is so easy to imagine that one feels not the least curiosity or wish to prosecute the acquaintance when an investigator undertakes to delineate him. For, in fact, might one not with an equal facility conjure up a Lutheran Freud, and observe how completely the illustrious father of psychoanalysis explifies permanent traits of the German national genius, of which Luther in his day was so notable an exponent? But let us forbear. And since, from the start, Luther assumed a relationship between his emotional crises and the progress of his mental development, suppose we endeavor to understand what inferences he drew.

* * *

Denifle's inference is of course unhesitating. Remorse, evil thoughts, illicit desires: all perfectly simple. Fundamentally Luther was living in a state of perpetual revolt

of the body against the spirit. Not to mince matters, the word was lust. *Concupiscentia carnis.* He was ridden by sex.

Wonders never cease! These people—I refer to Denifle and his converts—have mathematical knowledge of the violence with which fleshly desires maintained their assault on a man who breathed no word on this subject to anyone. Was ever such perspicuity! And the champions of Luther's purity on the other hand are no less remarkable. For do they not, with a no less serene certitude, affirm the unalloyed purity of the very thoughts of a man who no doubt had reserves like most other men? As if on such points one could trust a man even when he confesses! Let us side in this matter with none of the disputants. There is no way of knowing. We cannot contrive to look back into the past and discover what Luther chose to hide in his secret soul. If we stick to recorded fact we must rest content with establishing two points only.

The incontestible first is that no one ever accused Luther of leading an evil life while he was a monk, of having, that is to say, violated his oath of chastity. The second—and no one who makes an unbiased examination of the documents will contest this either—is that Denifle puts a narrow and a misleading interpretation on the words *concupiscentia carnis*, of which Luther made frequent use. See for instance this well known passage:[4] "When I was a monk," runs his argument in the *Com-*

[4] E., *Comment. in Gal.*, III, 20; *Dok.*, No. 52.

*mentary on the Epistle to the Galatians* published in 1535 (Luther was then fifty-two), "I used to think my salvation was forfeited the moment I was visited by fleshly concupiscence, as for instance, an evil impulse, a desire (*libido*), an angry, hateful or jealous thought towards one of my brothers." A broad definition, obviously; and while *libido* may imply lewdness, the tendency of the other terms is to show that Luther had in mind something quite different. But what follows clinches the point. "Again and again concupiscence visited me. I could find no rest. I was tortured perpetually by such thoughts as this: 'There! You have committed this or that sin again. There! You have succumbed to envy, impatience, etc.' Oh, if I had then understood the meaning of Paul's words: *Caro concupiscit adversus Spiritum* and *Haec sibi invicem adversantur*!"

Not a text to be juggled interpretatively. I have taken pains to recall the date it was written and that Luther was then fifty-two. It can still be objected that this is an *ex post facto* account. Luther may in good faith have lost all recollection of the carnal temptations which played a primary part in bringing about these crises. Or perhaps, remembering them, he is nevertheless, out of piety and a sense of decorum and human dignity, determined to draw a veil over certain intimate phases of his life. We could talk about that for a century without proving anything. But so far as the definition of the words *concupiscentia carnis* is concerned, the Lutheran theologians have the right of it. Denifle attaches a much too limited meaning.

He has perpetrated a piece of pre-Freudian romancing; the proof will not soon be forthcoming. All of which, I repeat, implies not the slightest desire on the author's part to break any lances in the equally vain endeavor to establish the fact that Luther's innocence was unsullied.

Was contrition the cause of these paroxysms of despair? No, not in the accepted sense of the word. For it has been agreed that Luther was guilty of no reprehensible act while he was in the monastery; he did nothing for which he could be accounted a bad monk. Having read Denifle and followed his argument and examined his documents closely, one discovers no reason for rejecting tradition on this point. He was not a bad monk. Excessively good in fact. Or at least one who fell into sin from excess of zeal. A man who, magnifying the seriousness of his most trivial sins, scrutinized his conscience unceasingly, observed absorbedly its most obscure perturbations, was haunted by the terrible thought of the Judgment Day, and nourished in his bosom a sense of his own unworthiness which was all the more disconcertingly violent because none of the remedies offered him had the slightest alleviating effect on his sufferings.

## II

Very good. We have then a man in secular life. He is carrying a too heavy burden. His soul is troubled. His conscience torments him. Not because he is a rascal, or wicked or wayward. But he feels in the depths of his

soul the stir and the struggle of so many unholy desires, so many painful temptations, so many powerful vices and secret treacheries. He despairs of himself, of salvation; the purity without blemish, which alone would nerve him to stand before God, is so unattainable. But to flee to a monastery, to lead in a monk's cell a life of prayer and meditation, to obey the stroke of the clock, to be minutely directed by competent superiors under ancient monastic rules—might not such a regimen in so pure, so holy, so serene a place expel the infection of sin? On a sudden impulse Luther entered the monastery at Erfurt. Months passed. But where was this feeling of rebirth and of purification which so many monks had described in so many celebrated passages, and which made them liken the taking of holy orders to a second baptism? The experience, Luther felt, was all too decisive: monastic life did not suffice for the peace of his soul. The observances, the fasts, the litanies in the chapel, the prayers and the meditations prescribed for him—these no doubt met the needs of other men, who had not such a hunger for the absolute. But this ordered succession of pieties brought no peace to his storm beaten soul, impatient of bounds, and craving divine love and ultimate certainty.

And what of the doctrine they taught him and the authors they gave him to read? How did these affect him? Let us rule out at once all that smacks of conjecture or pedantry. Much thought has been given to what books Luther read, could have read, must have read, while at Erfurt. A praiseworthy zeal and ingenuity have been

squandered on the question of the influences that he underwent successively. The results are interesting enough. Even very plausible. But they have little relation to our present purpose.

A man of Luther's temperament, when he reads a book, sees only one thing,—what he brings to it. He retains only that to which something in him responds. A word, a sentence, an idea impresses him. He makes it his own. He lets it sink into his consciousness deeper and deeper, till at last it collides with some element in his nature of which even he has before been ignorant, but from which living water, a spring that had theretofore been sealed up awaiting the call and the magic touch, now bursts forth suddenly. But the hidden spring was there all the time in the form of potential energy. So we need have no scruple about ignoring no end of patient and well-meaning researches, reserving only one fact from the many offered.

Luther, it seems,[5] paid little attention at Erfurt to the great scholastic systems of the twelfth century. He remained quite ignorant of Thomism in particular. There is nothing surprising in this. And if he had been acquainted with Thomism he would only have reacted violently against it. His reading matter, in addition to certain mystics, and, notably, Tauler, whom he read rather late (it is said, moreover, that he understood Tauler imperfectly and perverted his meaning unscrupulously, but let us assume that he merely made a free use of his author without

[5] D.-P., III, p. 79 *sq.*

caring greatly whether or not his interpretations agreed with the doctrine of Eckhart's disciple—enough if they had a place in his own ideology and a meaning for Luther) —his reading matter, to resume, was primarily the *Commentary on the Book of Proverbs* of the nominalist Gabriel Biel (died 1495), the chief exponent of Occamism in Germany; the "monarch among theologians," at least in Tübingen, and the friend of Jean Trithème and of Geiler von Kaiserberg. In old age Luther was to make his boast that he still knew by heart whole pages of the illustrious doctor.

What then, did Luther find in the writings of Biel as he read and re-read them in his eager search for escape from his terrible doubts and difficulties? Two theories, besides many others, which when put side by side, appear contradictory. This is neither the place nor the time to show how summarily this contradiction resolves itself for those who know Occam's system. Biel claimed, first, that the consequences of Original Sin affected mainly the lower faculties and the inferior powers of the human spirit, and that will and reason remain approximately the same as before the Fall; man is therefore able by the unaided force of his nature to observe the law and perform the appointed tasks, not "in perfect accordance with the intent of the Lawgiver" but at least in accordance with "the substance of the fact"; and therefore, the human will being capable, by this same "unaided force," of following the dictates of right reason, man is able to put the love of God first. This supreme and unreserved act of love creates in him such a

disposition that, sinner though he is, he is able to obtain the sanctifying grace and the remission of sins.

At the same time, however, since his system corresponded to Occam's, Biel made a reservation to safeguard divine Omnipotence. It was absolute, without limitations of any sort. It was even arbitrary. The theologian of Tübingen taught, for example, that moral laws derived their force and their sanction from the will of God and thus only. Sin was sin and not virtue, because God had thus decreed. If God willed the opposite, the position would be reversed: theft, adultery, even enmity to God would become meritorious. God's rewards and punishments therefore have nothing to do with personal merits or demerits as such. In order that good actions may be rewarded, it is necessary only that God shall accept them. And God will accept them *when* he pleases, *as* he pleases, and *if* he pleases, from considerations outside the range of man's logic. In a word, unconditioned and inscrutable predestination.

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Thus pronounced the revered Gabriel Biel. Thus, after he had died, he went on pronouncing still, by the agency of his books and of his disciples. Picture now a man of Luther's perfervid nature exposed to these doctrines, a man in love with the absolute, a man troubled besides and tormented, who was seeking always some means of assuaging his consuming thirst for righteousness, some deliverance from his condition of doubt and spiritual

agony. The word was, according to Biel: "Brace up. It is in your power. Man's nature is such that he can, by his natural strength, by the exercise of his will and his reason, fulfill the law; he can in the end succeed in loving God above everything." And so Luther braced up. He did what was possible according to his nature and even what was impossible, in order that there might be born in him this *dispositio ultimata et sufficiens de congruo ad gratiæ infusionem* of which Biel speaks. It was vain. And when, after all his striving, the soul that hungered for certainty found no relief, when the peace and the liberation he sought still failed to descend upon him, it is not hard to guess the bitter feeling of impotence and of utter despair that prostrated him at the feet of a God who kept stonily silent and opposed the blank surface of an impenetrable wall. . . .

Bit by bit other thoughts emerged in his dizzy brain. Good actions, Biel taught, are meritorious only if God accepts them. Could it be that God wasn't accepting his own good actions, that God was casting him out as one of the wicked by an incomprehensible and arbitrary decree? Oh, how could one know? And what terrible anguish arose from the doubt!

Thus the doctrine on which he was nurtured, this Gabrielist offshoot of Occamism, the tenacious influence of which on Luther was first effectively pointed out by Denifle [6]—this doctrine, which would first exalt the power

[6] D.-P., III, ch. IV, par. IV, p. 191-232, Cf. Strohl I, 89-102, which refers to recent works.

of the human will, then abase it with a leer at God's unfathomable omnipotence, only raised the monk's hopes in order to shatter them more effectually and so leave him gasping in the tragic grip of complete exhaustion.

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"Whose fault but his own?" jibes Denifle. Why did not Luther abandon a doctrine which caused him suffering and set out to find one more accordant with his peace of mind? If he had gone to their works he would have found that St. Thomas, St. Bonaventure, or even Gilles de Rome, the acknowledged theologian of the Augustinians, all reasoned quite differently from Biel, especially when it came to the question of the coöperation of divine grace and the human will in the work of salvation.

To be sure. But would that discovery have mattered to Luther? Would the teachings of St. Thomas, or Bonaventure have had any effect on the Luther we know, on the Luther that Denifle himself claimed to know? What could be more naïve? From the inexhaustible stores of scholastic learning Denifle keeps extracting treasures of wisdom and conciliation. He displays them to Luther with a somewhat belated zeal: "Oh, if the Augustinian had only known! And he could have known. It was criminal negligence not to inquire." No. If the Augustinian had known all these, had read and re-read and again re-read, it would have made no difference. Only one thing mattered to him, his own intimate experience.

It was not teaching that he needed so desperately, but

spiritual life, inner peace, liberating certainty, and rest in the Lord. The teaching that was afforded him he took as it came. He assimilated all that suited his temperament. The rest he pushed violently from him. It was not his mind that decided which doctrines were helpful and which were injurious. It was rather his heart and his instinct. Subjected to other influences, Luther might have given a different form to his action. Essentially, however, he would have struggled, sought, and suffered exactly the same until he arrived at—what? Simply peace of mind.

Did he have any help in his painful and obstinate quest? Did he find brotherly hands stretched out to him to draw him from the abyss? It is said that he did. Luther says so himself, and then characteristically denies it the very next moment. French readers who began their Lutheran studies thirty years ago with Kuhn's book will not have forgotten his touching pages about the relations of Luther and Staupitz. Much more recently Jundt attributed to Staupitz's influence the beginning of a "radical" change in Luther's ideas. Did not Luther, in fact, refer to Staupitz as his father in a letter written in 1545 near the end of his life? He owed to Staupitz, he said, his rebirth in Christ. This explains the tradition which regards Staupitz as a John the Baptist or precursor of Martin Luther.[7]

But how should one take this statement? In the doc-

[7] For the relations of Luther and Staupitz, see the excellent chapter in Strohl I, p. 111 *sq.* Compare with the very confused account of Scheel, *Luther* II, p. 193 *sqq.*

trinal sense? Was the doctrine of the precursor the same as that of the prophet he announced? Did Staupitz reveal to Luther a doctrine which contained in the germ what Luther was later to preach? Surely not. What the busy, much-traveled inspector of the Augustinian monasteries brought to the young monk, whose fervent piety and qualities of mind must certainly have impressed him, was above all moral and spiritual reassurance. He consoled him. He taught him not to let himself be possessed and tortured by the conviction of sin, by the constant fear, which might easily become morbid, that he was putting himself beyond the operation of grace at the very moment when it was extended to him, or losing it almost immediately after he had received it. Doubtless Staupitz was puzzled about those "temptations," the horror of which Luther so often described to him. It was not a question of coveting material satisfactions; Luther made that clear many times. According to one curious account "it was not a question of women" either but of "genuine difficulties," of those wholly spiritual temptations that only Gerson—Luther's words again—had known, described, and endeavored to repel.[8] Staupitz, anyway, displayed in his talk with his young confrère a wholly humane and brotherly piety. And he sent him away relaxed and soothed and temporarily reconciled.

That then was the helpful influence that he exercised. There was never any question of a doctrinal revelation.

[8] N. Ericens, *Sylvula Sententiarum*, 1566, p. 174; *Dok.*, No. 76; *non de mulieribus, sed von den rechten Knotten.* Cf. Scheel's discussion, *Luther*, II, 130-135.

And although Luther says otherwise in the beautiful dedicatory epistle to Staupitz (which he wrote in 1518, on Holy Trinity, and had printed in the front of his *Resolutions on Indulgences* in a place more prominent than even his letter to Pope Leo); although, with the double purpose of reassuring the public about his own orthodoxy and implicating a well-known and highly respected theologian as much as he could in the conflict, Luther does his protector the honor of imputing to him a really fundamental revelation; although, after thanking Staupitz for having explained to him once that "true repentance begins with the love of righteousness and of God," he goes on to describe the sort of illumination that this formula produced in his mind and how all his ideas seemed to crystallize about it ("From all directions," he says, "Scriptural verses came to lend your opinion support; they came to smile at it and to dance in a circle about it"); although Luther, in short, concerned as he was to make plain the importance to his thought of this incident, explains that he saw in Staupitz's formula the exact opposite of the "Gabrielist" affirmation (namely, that repentance *culminated*, after a long succession of progressive efforts, in the love of righteousness and of God, the hard-won trophy of a protracted struggle): yet one would betray some naïvete if one took Luther's declaration literally, as Seeberg does, and announced that this was in fact the real origin of all Luther's doctrinal teaching. A conclusion all the more unacceptable since it would come into conflict presently with the notion that Luther's medita-

tions on active and passive justice are actually the foundation of Luther's system.

In reality Staupitz probably used this expression, about repentance beginning with the love of righteousness and of God, without any special reference to theories or systems. If Luther interpreted it and gave it a doctrinal value, that was only because it excited in him a multitude of thoughts with which he had long been familiar and of which Staupitz had no inkling. By the very chemistry of his nature Luther transformed what must have been a commonplace formula for anyone but himself into one that was rich in virtue and efficacy. A fine distinction? One would have to grant that. But psychologically an important one. For to dream that Luther had any collaborators in the long and painful and highly personal task of his "liberation" would be a mistake, a very serious mistake.

Had it been a question merely of constructing a system, of composing an authoritative work—. It was nothing so trivial! Luther was examining himself. He was finding within an intense consciousness of the force, the virulence, the tragic magnitude of sin. It was nothing that had been taught him. It was an hourly experience. And this sin which weighed on the conscience of the monk was something that nothing could kill or prevent from mastering all men however desperately they resisted and sought to banish it. And yet Luther found in himself as well a sense no less strong, no less personal, of the immeasurable holiness of a God who determined with sovereign power the

fate of his creatures and predestined them to eternal life or death for reasons inscrutible to mankind. Luther wished to be saved. He wished it with all his instincts, with all his being. But he also knew that however he spurred himself on to "deserve" salvation, he would never succeed, neither he nor anyone else in this world—not at any time.

Could any system, therefore, of more or less logically ordered theological concepts ease his mind? No, he needed rather that a profound assurance should be implanted, rooted ever more deeply, in his heart. There was only one man whose effort to procure for Luther that certainty could avail. And that man was Luther.

## CHAPTER III

### THE ILLUMINATION. LUTHER ON THE EVE OF THE QUARREL ABOUT INDULGENCES

NO, nobody pointed out to the Augustinian of Erfurt the path he should take. Luther was himself the solitary and secret artificer, not of his doctrine, but of his own inner tranquillity. And it was just as he said; he first glimpsed and then plainly perceived a way of escape from the terrors, the torments, the paroxysms of anxiety which ravaged him by concentrating on a problem affecting not his intellect but his peace of mind, the problem, namely, of God's righteousness.

It is almost impossible in a book of this character to follow in detail the development of Luther's thought from the Commentary on the Psalms, in which some of Luther's characteristic ideas are already finding timid expression, to the Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans, throughout the infinitely broader expanse of which Luther figures as one strongly fortified by the Pauline doctrine. A few lines, at the most a few pages, do not suffice to indicate with a documentary completeness—especially in view of the dubious authenticity of some of the documents—the development of ideas which are still often vaguely de-

fined and of feelings which too frequently find expression in borrowed and sometimes equivocal phrases. Let us merely endeavor to apprehend these ideas in the essence or, better, interpret those emotions in all their force and all their explosive freshness, without examining documents and citations with what would be, in this instance, a misplaced particularity.

## I

In the monastery Luther had striven anxiously to compass his soul's salvation by meritorious works. What has been the result? An immense discouragement, fearful moods of despair, and, little by little, the partial but growing conviction that all struggle is vain, that there is no end to depravity and that sin is a permanent fact. Sin itself, not mere fallibility, for which some external remedy can be found, but the infernal, illimitable force which forever separates man from his Creator.

How to find relief then from doubt and despair and terror? In a lightning flash, which revealed suddenly the whole extent of his past reflections and reveries, Luther saw the answer. He never forgot it. At what moment, exactly, did this revelation occur? Towards the end of 1512. Or perhaps in 1513. Before the middle of 1514, anyway. And in the monastery at Wittenberg, in the tower.[1]

[1] The problem of the tower! A perfect example of the Lutheran ode which embattled Protestants and Catholics never tire of developing, strophe for antistrophe. One account, attributed to Cordatus's compilation (June-July, 1532), reads as follows: "Once when I was in that tower (in which was situated the

Was it a question of a doctrinal discovery, new intellectual concepts? Merely raising the question makes plain its absurdity. Could any mere argument relieve mental anguish of the sort from which Luther suffered? Luther needed a cure instead. And a cure it was that he found, or at least a method.

Theretofore he had brought all his energies to bear in a desperate effort to succeed by main force and unaided. He would purify his soul; he would stamp out the evil in it; he would transform himself from the sinner into a righteous man. It sounded easy enough but was harder in practice. Experience, and a cruelly gained experience, proved to Luther that all his efforts to win salvation resulted in sanguinary defeat.

Suddenly he perceived a quite different solution. Might not the Christian who, instead of constantly bracing and overtaxing his own feeble will, should subject himself, with a mingling of joy and terror, to the operation of an omnipotent, infinitely holy and truly regenerating supernatural will—*might not such a one*, despairing utterly of himself and his personal efforts, if he ceased to exhaust himself in repelling the promptings of evil and accepted Hell itself as no more than his just deserts and, instead of struggling vainly, sought shelter in God as chickens seek

secret place of the monks, *secretus locus monachorum*) I was meditating," etc. (*Table Talk*, W., III, 228, No. 3232a). "The secret place of the monks." What a revelation! Luther's great illumination, then, took place "in the latrine," as Abbé Paquier triumphantly expresses it! (D.-P., II, 316, n. 2).—Another version (*Table Talk*, W., III, No. 3232c) substitutes *hypocaustum* for *locus secretus*: "*Cum semel in hae turri et hypocausto specularer.*" Thus is Lutheranism saved. But a third version speaks of *cloaca*. All this is even more absorbing than the inkspot in the Wartburg!

shelter under the hen, and trusted God's infinity to supply what he lacked—*might not such a one* in the end find consolation and peace?

A singularly bold and complete metamorphosis. A moment before, the vain and furious strain of the gladiator tensing every muscle only to fail the more pitiably. Now, instead, the utter and blessed passivity and the resignation of one who, confessing himself to be beaten even before the encounter, somehow builds his hope on the very magnitude of his defeat.

* * *

Of course Luther himself, and all of the commentators after him, have translated, or, to speak more exactly, transposed into theological terms, these realities of a different order. The core of the matter is Luther's sudden perception that in order to resolve the main problem, that is, the problem of justice, one had to invert the argument. To be accepted of God, as the Catholic Church taught and as Luther believed, it was indispensable that a man should attain righteousness. But attaining righteousness was the one thing precisely that was impossible. The chasm that yawned between God's holiness and the lowliness of his creatures was so vast that mere man, brandishing at the length of absurdly diminutive arms the almost imperceptible ladder of "good works," looked so grotesque as almost to make one forget the essential blasphemy of his complacency. For God alone is able to abolish the chasm and to reach across it to man and, enveloping him in a

prevailing love, a love which pervades and regenerates, to raise him to the Creator.

To abolish the chasm without abolishing sin. "But what ignorance!" protests Father Denifle. He has only made a clumsy rediscovery of old truths. The whole thing is merely an attack on the Church for an error it never taught. For even this novice among theologians might at least have known what the Church in set terms professes, that the just man is rendered just by God's justification. If that is the Lutheran formula, what, then, was Luther's discovery?

But Denifle is mistaken and here tends to jump at conclusions. For the Church, it is true, justification is the work of God. But by justification God only recognizes merit that man has acquired by a moral exertion undertaken "under the impulse of and with the aid of divine grace."[2] There is no opposition between individual and personal righteousness, *i.e.*, natural acquired virtue, and the righteousness of Christ, whether it be the righteousness he possesses himself or the mystic virtue he communicates to us when by our coöperation we approximate his virtue. Justification eliminates sin, but it leaves to natural virtue its rôle, its part, and its efficacy.

For Luther, on the other hand, justification leaves sin untouched and affords no room for natural morality. The righteousness of man is fundamentally irreconcilable with

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[2] Strohl I, 153.

the righteousness of God. In vain does theology distinguish between present and original sin, which is not merely spiritual darkness but, as Luther expresses it in his Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans, a defect of any rightness or efficacy whether of body or of soul, whether of the inner or the outer man. In brief, a complete opposition to God. Nothing banishes such depravity, neither baptism nor repentance; it vitiates everything in us including our good actions, which proceed from pride or self-interest.

* * *

Besides how could God, being master and sovereign in his decisions, confine himself to an objective reckoning up of the observance or non-observance of legal prescriptions when he passes judgment on men? God's relations with man can have no juridical element. All is love, an active, regenerating love, which God in his terrible majesty vouchsafes to a fallen creature. A love which inclines Him, not to pardon man's sins, but to not impute them to him. God regards as just every sinner who, confessing that he is such and accepting with regard to his moral abjection and soilure the testimony of a humble conscience, feels and says that God, who alone is righteous, has a perfect right to reject him. This, in Lutheran language, means every man who receives the gift of faith (for Luther regards faith as something other than belief; it is the recognition by the sinner of the righteousness of

God).[3] The sinner, therefore, who, taking refuge in God's divine pity, is conscious of his weakness, despises it, and proclaims, on the other hand, his trust in God, is regarded by God as just. Even though he is unjust; or, to speak more exactly, even though he is at once just and unjust: *Revera peccatores, sed reputatione miserentis Dei justi; ignoranter justi et scienter injusti; peccatores in re, justi autem in spe.*[4] . . . Just in hope? More exactly, in anticipation. For God merely begins here below the work of regeneration, of vivification, of sanctification which, when concluded, will make us just, that is to say, perfect. We are not yet the justified but folk who remain to be justified: *non justificati, sed justificandi.*

Works, then, disappear. Entirely. *Arbitramur justificari hominem per fidem, sine operibus legis*: Luther found the celebrated formula in the Epistle to the Romans (III, 28). From 1516 he rejected with decision the traditional interpretation of *opera legis* as external observances. "Error!" he exclaims, in a letter to Spalatin, October 29, 1516; and adds, in anticipation of future battles: "On this point I differ fundamentally from Erasmus[5]." *Opera legis*, all human works of whatever nature, deserve the reprobation of the Apostle. Salvation? Our fate is to feel in us always the fermentation of evil and imperfection. But

[3] In spite of several texts of this period which appear to be reminiscences—and without taking account of the modifications of his first conception that Luther made subsequently. There is some truth in Denifle's words: "With Luther and Melanchthon, the idea of faith is in a perpetual ebb and flow." (D.-P., III, 307.)

[4] *Comment, in Romanos*, Fo. 142 (Ficker, II, 104-106.)

[5] Enders, I, No. 25, p. 63.

also, if we have faith, we have God in us. In his presence alone is our hope of being justified and of taking our place among his elect whose salvation He predestines throughout all eternity, because He loves them enough to give them eternal life. Thus this impenetrable mystery of predestination, which seems hard and cruel to men of small faith who speak of God's plan as a cobbler might speak of leather, appears full of promise and of love to religious souls, the sort that flower best in the incommunicable sweetness of an absolute dependence on God.

* * *

A quite personal doctrine. One sees directly how and why it was capable of procuring Luther that peace of mind which the traditional teaching of the Church did not afford him. That dissatisfaction with himself which he never lost, that keen sense of the tenacity and perpetual virulence of sin which obsessed him even at moments when he should have felt liberated and purified, that consciousness of being incapable, even when he made the greatest and holiest efforts of any achievement unalloyed by sin, egotism, and self-seeking, things which formerly had filled Luther with anxiety, doubt, despair—he beheld them all now, with an indescribable force and clarity, as conditions that God had willed as indispensable to salvation!

That explains why Luther always regarded his "discovery" as a revelation. When a man suddenly, after such a bitter quest, finds the sovereign remedy for the

ills that afflict him, when a man conceives with an irresistible force a truth whose validity for him seems to prove its universal application and worth, would he naturally imagine that he himself was responsible for his new happiness? No, it must be a revelation. Otherwise one could not regard truth as infallible and universally applicable on the score of its sacred origin. Oh, the splendor of being its herald! It was not the secret of any mere man that Luther planned to publish. In proclaiming the word of God, the liberating secret that God has confided to him, he would know the superhuman grandeur of sharing in God's majesty, God's omniscience, the infallibility of the common Father. An invention of Luther's, this discovery in the tower? No. A gift of God to be carried aloft that all men might reverence it on its own transcendent account.

* * *

A doctrine of peace in all its bright freshness. A doctrine also of power and potency. That point must be stressed, all the more because it is apt to be denied with more vehemence.

How vividly these formulæ of 1516 and 1517 reveal Martin Luther's troubled soul, its torment, its violence, its excess! He proceeds—indeed leaps—from one paradox to another. He bounds with ease, with agility, with a fearful abandon from the most desperate doubt to the most confiding belief, from an excited acceptance of hell and damnation to the most tranquil swoonings in the arms of divinity, from fear to love, from death to life. What could

be more pathetic, more personal, and less bookish? To this vast pendulation, to these sudden leaps, to these abrupt transitions from the uttermost heights to the lowest depths is owing the tonic quality, the robustness, the health inhering in Luther's "system" in these years of abundant and youthful energy (in 1516 he was thirty-three), which was later to wane. But for this one would not know how to explain that burst of virile power and above all the audacity of the fighter of 1517.

It has been constantly alleged for four centuries that Luther struck a good bargain for himself morally; his hostility to effort, whether to do good or to combat evil, is cited with condemnation and scorn; it is blithely assumed that he made no distinction between good and bad behaviour, both alike being tainted with sin. It is true that Luther, in speech or writing, gave utterance many times to such ideas as the following, which Veit Dietrich set down from his lips in the autumn of 1533 (*Tischreden*, W., I, No. 654): "The Christian—so passive in his attitude to God and to men. From the one he receives with passivity; from the other he no less passively suffers. Benefits from God and afflictions from men." But what had the Augustinian to say on this subject in 1516 at the time of the Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans?

The question turns upon Luther's conception of faith. This gift of God, he tells us, establishes a direct contact between man and the divinity. It exalts man so vastly that he is as it were transported outside of himself to God. The soul of man is no longer distinct from God but united to

him by faith. In Him, with Him, and like Him it hates all evil. With Him and like Him it is filled with the love of the good. And this good which it loves, it accomplishes. "Not to do good," reads the Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans, "is not to love God." [6] In justifying the sinner who knows himself as such and is horrified by the sense of his sinfulness, God destroys that specious and subtle egotism which vitiates the ostensibly good actions of men. And since He *is* love, it is with love that He fills the believer's heart, an overflowing love which pours itself out on the weak, the unhappy, the wretched, whatever their circumstances. A splendid revivifying gift of God, faith, to put it in other terms, creates in man an undying reluctance to remain unworthy of his new condition. It ferments in him like a yeast. It does not transform him suddenly with the touch of a magic wand, but it urges him on and inspires him to undertake with bright confidence an advance towards an ideal which will be attained in a future life, when faith, which itself progresses and arrives at perfection at death, shall have wholly expelled the old Adam.[7] Yes, the Christian rejoices in God. He flings himself open to God. He allows God to penetrate him; he is passive—passive, *sicut mulier ad conceptum*. He does not take the initiative by plunging into futile, sterile, and even harmful activities. But the joy of this union with God spurs him on to action. When he has enjoyed God, he makes use of God: *uti* then *frui* . . .

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[6] *Comment. in Romanos*, ed Ficker, II, 78.
[7] Strohl II, 86.

His life is an uninterrupted progress, *de bono in melius*; it is a battle, says Luther, or, again, a penance; a task, and a hard one, such a task that man never feels that he has a right to stop on the assumption that the end is attained but up to his last breath pushes forward towards a goal that will never be reached until after death.

* * *

Such a view explains the greater or less assurance of his soul's salvation that Luther feels, at this epoch, in proportion as God seems near to him or far from him.

A bit later, in 1518, in the course of his disputation with Caïetan (W., II, 13) and in his lectures in 1517-1518 on the Epistle to the Hebrews, we shall hear him declare that the Christian must always feel confident of salvation: *Christianum opportet semper securum esse*. He stigmatises as false the scholasticism "which denies the possibility of this certainty." Whoever has doubts of his own salvation is not justified but is "vomiting forth God's grace." Does not the Christian find certainty in the sacrifice Christ made on the cross for all men, an objective guarantee having value regardless of their subjective condition. But in 1516 Luther took a different view.

To be sure he was already saying, and repeating with emphasis, that the believer who feels God working inside of him and beginning to vivify him already possesses a germ of hope; for God does not deceive his creatures and if he has begun the task he will finish it. But if the intimate knowledge of the Christian, his personal experience,

begets peace and trust in him, does it also engender in him the true certainty from which indestructible security may emerge?

Security: at this epoch that was Luther's great enemy. He made no bones then of saying the opposite—at least so it appears—of what he was to assert in 1518; and if we were to read in the Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans: *Christianum oportet nunquam securum esse*, we should have no cause for surprise. To feel safe, to allow one's self to be lulled into false security by a belief in the sanctifying effects of baptism or of penance or by the sense of having accomplished meritorious works—was not that equivalent to letting one's self be persuaded to sit with hands folded quietly and to make no exertion to extirpate errors with groanings and sorrow and labor? In fact for the Luther of 1516, the assurance of salvation varied with the varying ardor of faith. If faith increased, hope was magnified also. If faith declined, if the contact with God became less immediate, hope faded, to wax again on the instant of a rapproachement. That seemingly lifeless formula, namely justification by faith, was really, it will be seen, a store of dynamic energy. There is no denying the joyful confidence, the élan; the invincible assurance contained in this formula, or what it expressed for a Martin Luther on the eve of the happenings of 1517: the conviction, namely, that God was for him, with him and in him, a God who was not the incarnate justice of the theologians but an active radiating will, a sovereign goodness operating

through love and giving itself to man in order that man might give himself to God.

* * *

A bare outline, this. The author is not unaware of all that has been omitted, all the opulent ramifications of Luther's earliest thought. He is conscious also of having been forced, in order to give sharpness to the lines, to lop off countless details which blur and confuse the main picture. To arrive at an impression of what is called Luther's doctrine or system at a given period of his life, it is necessary to make a selection from a multiplicity of sketches and jottings, to pick out from the infinitely abundant material, the profusion of which conveys Luther's special quality at the same time that it was his undoing, the self-portrait which best expresses him. Or rather, to vary the metaphor (since the genius of Luther was not really plastic), suppose it a case of our having to disentangle a single, continuous, well defined, rather shrill melodic line from the tumult of songs which well up, with an inexhaustible spontaneity, from a soul that to each is a sounding board, songs that sometimes harmonize, reinforce and heighten each other, and sometimes break against one another in shattering discords.

Contradictions? For four centuries that word has prevailed. For four centuries the most superficial readers, the most arrant pedants, and—what is more serious—some men of a sound but limited scholarship, have exulted im-

moderately over the thousand inconsistencies to which Luther, from page to page and from year to year, without stint committed himself in his clarion utterances. What a waste of energy! How much better to recognize that in the Augustinian of Erfurt and of Wittenberg there is nothing of the accurate and methodical compiler of duly related concepts.

A theologian? No. A Christian hungry for Christ, a man thirsty for God, one in whose tumultuous heart were restless and frenzied desires, impulses, superhuman joys, illimitable despairs, a whole world of thoughts and sentiments which, under stress of circumstance, overflowed in swift, irresistible waves of power. Each wave expressed equally and authentically the heart and brain which it flowed from. Each reflected an aspect of Luther. Thus Luther at times, concentrating all his powers of perception on religion in his quivering haste to possess God, passes over the Law to come at the Gospel directly. But at times also, haunted by the feeling that an undue confidence is the cause of the worst moral lapses, he loudly reproaches the church for endorsing as meritorious some actions that may have been marred by egotistical thoughts and the motive of calculation. And then, as if he no longer had any interest except in conduct, Luther drops for the moment this passionate preoccupation with pure religion which swayed him a moment before, mastered him and wholly possessed him.

Such at bottom was Luther's nature. It explains his work, and was manifest from the start—at the time of

the lectures on the Epistle to the Romans, in which for the first time we see him as one ready armed and prepared for combat, and wielding the weapon of faith.

## II

Let us pause a moment at the year 1516. What was Luther exactly? Was he one of those pious Christians, then so prevalent, whose obsession was that the Church had fallen into serious decadence, who demanded a complete reform of the Papacy, of the episcopacy, and of the regular and secular clergy? Did Luther blend his voice with theirs? It was formerly thought that he did. The hatred of abuses, the desire for purification, the wish to buttress the crumbling edifice—these were motives that formerly were attributed to Luther. Now we take a different view.

Reform? There was, to be sure, some question of that, or at least of his bringing about some changes in the religious world of his day! But as for the famous journey to Rome which all the historians, taking Luther's word for it, have for so long regarded as determining Luther's reforming activity—it does not seem necessary even to mention it in this brief sketch of Luther's spiritual history from 1505 to 1515, or to take the trouble to summarize the evidence appearing in recent studies to the end that this trivial incident may assume its proper proportions. It would not be worth while.

It matters little to us and less to the history of the Refor-

mation if Luther, in the brief four weeks that he spent in the Eternal City, from the end of December, 1510, to the end of January, 1511, was more or less disturbed in some of his prejudices or offended in some of his feelings by customs, ways of speaking and acting, which were utterly foreign to him, stranger as he was at the Vatican.

Let us once and for all pass over the "Rome of the Borgias" and the tales, after all rather commonplace, collected by friendly reporters of the great man's utterances. Scheel has said with wisdom: "The Augustinian neither saw nor heard anything extraordinary in Rome—*auch in Rome sah und horte er nichts ungewohnliches.*" [8] He pursued conscientiously the routine of a pilgrim, and a pilgrim without any special critical sense at that. He was not the aggressive Luther. He brought away, from his dealings with the business offices of the Holy See, as we should express it, and with the cardinals also, a very favorable impression, as he several times recorded. For the rest, what did he know about Rome? Coming there on the affairs of his order, he would, as a German monk, have been thrown for the most part with the German and Flemish folk who abounded in Rome. And this circumstance, it may be noted in passing, would have doubtless prevented his coming in contact with the various doctors or schools of thought, which insatiable students of influences, not long since, were fond of conceiving as having perhaps attracted his notice in the course of this hasty visit of not more than

[8] Scheel, *Luther*, II, p. 295. For further details, Boehmer, *Luthers Romfahrt*, Leipzig, 1914.

a month, a mere incident, if they could but regard it as such. *Mirabilis Urbis Romæ.* That again is what it all comes to!

What Luther cared about from 1505 to 1515 was not reforming the church. He cared about Luther. Luther's soul and Luther's salvation. Only that. And, indeed, is not this the essence of Luther's originality? In place of a religion whose adherents were firmly and finally ensconced in a generous and ample structure combining the approved materials of both Judaism and Hellenism (the solid mass of Aristotelianism for the ground floor, and above, resting on these stout pillars from Aristotle's Lyceum, the Gospel embalmed in theology)—*in place of all this*, was it not the main object of Luther to promulgate a quite personal religion, in which man confronted his God directly and without intermediaries, alone, with no panoply of good works, without the parasitic intervention of priests or of mediating saints, without the benefit of indulgences, acquired in this world and exchangeable in the next, or of liberating absolutions?

Not that Luther, in his private reflections, was sunk in complete egotism. He knew that other men experienced these agonies, the full horror of which had left him crushed and broken. It would not have occurred to him to keep his discovery to himself. The secret that God has revealed he teaches and preaches to all and sundry with an evangelical joy—in his letters, in his lectures, in his sermons. And since, in 1515 and 1516, external circum-

stances cause him gradually to emerge from his silence and his obscurity; since his nomination, in April, 1515, as Vicar to the district for the monasteries of Misnie and of Thuringia, the district adjoining Staupitz's, forced him to broaden the field of his interests and the circle of his relationships, it is possible likewise to follow, in those sermons of his which survive,—from the oldest, which dates from 1515, to the famous sermons on the Decalog preached between June, 1516, and February, 1517, in the pulpit of Wittenberg,—the development of his thought and the consolidation of his power.

Invaluable texts for our purpose. Saturated as they are with the personal theology of Luther, they proclaim with decision that man is incapable of good. The Augustinian here takes the aggressive, makes war on Aristotle who had taught free will and the human attainability of virtue; and through Aristotle he seems to be striking at the humanists, at Erasmus, at Erasmus's idea of free will, his moralism, his Christianity, oh blasphemy! which is at once a philosophy and a friendship. But above all these documents reveal what Luther believed in that momentous year was the very essence of reform.

In a curious relic of 1512, the earliest of his writings to have been preserved, he was already expressing himself on the point with a perfect clarity.[9] Yes, reform is necessary, he wrote; but it should begin by restoring to the

[9] W., I. p. 8 *sqq.*; Cf. E., *Op. var. arg.*, I, 29-41. It is a sermon Luther wrote for G. Mascov, Premonstrant, prior of the convent of Leitzkan. The text was not published until 1708. The date 1512 is uncertain.

priest a knowledge of and a respect for the truth of God. "I hear someone say: what crimes, what scandals—these fornications, this drunkenness, this mad passion for gaming, all these vices of the clergy! . . . They are scandals indeed and should be denounced and corrected: but the vices mentioned are apparent to all; they are grossly material; they attract everyone's attention; they stir up feeling . . . But alas for this evil, this incomparably more cruel and damaging scourge, this silent conspiracy to conceal or adulterate the true Word, an evil not grossly material which escapes observation, causes no excitement, arouses no horror . . ." And further, even at this relatively early date, he expresses feelings which often later he is destined to emphasize: "How many priests would you find today who would take less thought about a sin against chastity, the omission of a prayer, an error made in the reciting of the canon, than about their failure to preach and interpret correctly the Word of Truth? . . . And yet the one sin possible for a priest as such is a sin against the Word of Truth . . ."

These citations are long, but how refrain from transcribing this sentence also, so perfectly characteristic of Luther, in its very accent, in its controlled violence and vivid hyperbole: "To be chaste, good and learned, to augment the revenues of the parish, to build holy shrines, to double the wealth of the Church, to accomplish miracles if you will, or to raise the dead, or to cast out demons—what matter? The only true priest, the only true pastor, will be he who, by preaching to the people the Word of Truth, makes him-

self the annunciatory angel of the God of Hosts and the herald of the All High!"—To sum up, a reform of the Church? Well enough. A reform of religion, however, is all that much matters.

Let us glance now at the sermons on the Decalog. Here of course are many reflections on the conduct of the clergy. Daring utterances only from the point of view of us moderns, ignorant as we are of a freedom once permitted to preachers, their verbal audacities, and their truculent violence. What Luther emphasizes, here as elsewhere, is the defect of instruction, the indolent preaching of the Word, the neglectful indolence of the shepherd who dozes and lets the sheep stray. But what stirs Luther up at this time, as at earlier periods, is no pious horror of abuses, no overweaning ambition to buttress a crumbling Church. A reformer? Yes. Of the inner life. One who is already proclaiming the great principle which at Worms he will set forth on a world stage: That everyone shall abide by his own conscience—*Unus quisque robustus sit in conscientia sua.*[10]

* * *

It is interesting to turn to a page of Nietzsche's *Dawn*.[11] It is called: The First Christian. Here Nietzsche follows the story of an "ambitious and importunate" soul, a mind "full of superstition and also of ardor," the story of the Apostle Paul.

[10] *Comment. in Romanos*, ed. Ficker, I, 122.
[11] Nietzsche, *Aurore*, trans. Albert, Mercure de France, 1919, p. 74, No. 68.

He displays Paul suffering from a sick obsession, always present in his thought, always chafing his conscience. How fulfill the Law? And first he attempts to comply with its exigencies. He defends it furiously against its adversaries or against the merely indifferent. With a fanatical zeal he fulfills its prescriptions. Only to conclude, after all his experience, that a man of his sort, "violent, sensual, melancholy as he is, prone to harbor wrath, cannot fulfill such a law." And yet he persists. He contests every inch. In order to satisfy his crabbed desire for mastery, for perfect dominance, he resorts to strategy. And from all his efforts he draws in the end this desperate conclusion only: "It is not possible to escape the torment of failing to comply with the law . . . "

Then, in anguish, another desperate effort. Pain and agony. "The law becomes the cross on which he feels himself nailed. How he hates it. How he rages against it! How he looks everywhere for a way to destroy it! . . . " Suddenly, a vision, a burst of light, the liberating idea: Christ appears on a deserted road, his face illumined with a divine radiance; and Paul hears the words: "Why persecutest thou me?" Instantly he is healed of his wounded pride; his moral depression is dissipated, for morality itself is dissipated, destroyed, completed there on the cross. And Paul becomes the happiest of men. "The destiny of the Jews—no, the destiny of all humanity seems to him to depend on this sudden illumination; he has seized the idea of ideas, the key of keys, the light of lights; around him future history revolves." And the champion of the law

becomes the apostle, the propagandist, of its destruction. "I am outside of the law," he says; "if I were now again to confess the law, I would render Christ an accomplice in Sin." For the law served no purpose except to engender sin continually, "as corrupt blood gives rise to illness."

Henceforth, not only are our sins remitted, but sin itself is abolished; the law is dead and dead also the carnal spirit in which it resided—dead, or in process of dying and falling into putrefaction! Yet a few more days to be lived in the midst of this putrefaction! such is the fate of the Christian till the time when, united with Christ, he is raised from the dead like Him, participates like Him in divine grace, is a son of God also. "Here," Nietzsche concludes, "Paul's exaltation reaches its apogee and therewith also his importunity; the idea of union with Christ removes from him all shame, all sense of proportion, all spirit of submission—and his implacable will to power betrays itself in his drunken fatuity: he anticipates the divine glory . . . Such was the first Christian, the inventor of Christianity!"

Apology may be owing for having transcribed this long excerpt. But need one explain? Not just once, but all along the line as one reads, one is startled at finding Paul's name in places where, left to one's self, one would have said "Luther." It is of no consequence whether according to experts Nietzsche has given an accurate version of Paul's ideas. It is of slight moment also that certain of the formulæ which he applies to Paul do not quite fit, as they stand

and without some modification, with what we know about Luther's thought in these experimental years. We do not expect from Nietzsche such a study of Lutheran Paulinism as learned theologians can furnish. But Nietzsche, with remarkable sureness of hand, has traced for us the course of an evolution—the firm, supple curve which conveys at one stroke the operation of the thought and the consciences of both men, the apostle and the heretic, united by an apparent harmony, not of doctrine merely, but of moral constitution and psychological temper.

Therefore this passage furnishes us not merely with a clear and substantial resumé of the foregoing pages. It marks with emphasis the important turning points in this double record of successive spiritual states: Paul's spiritual evolution seen through the Lutheran prism; that of Luther, more or less consciously modeled upon his hypothesis about Paul. . . . *At this juncture*, when we shall have to envisage Luther—this isolated believer, preoccupied solely with himself, with his own salvation, with his own inner peace—at grips with a noisy cohort of men, his German contemporaries, who seizing on Luther's thought and words, bending them to fit their desires and interests, will contrive to give them a social value and dignity—*at a moment like this* it is not without value to be reminded by Nietzsche that the history of Christianity moves in cycles. And later, when the science of psychology is sufficiently developed to be applied without hesitation, it will doubtless be possible to discern in the individual whose personal

effort precipitates a revolution the clearly and strongly marked representative of a group or family of like yet diversified minds recurring again and again down through the ages.

# PART II

## FRUITION

# CHAPTER IV

## THE QUESTION OF INDULGENCES

THUS the Luther who, outraged by his visit to Rome, under cover of silence developed a passion for reforming ecclesiastical abuses, is dead; he no longer exists for us of today. In his place we have a Christian and a recluse who has thought and suffered a great deal before arriving at his truth. How came such a man, preoccupied as he was with his inner religious life, to be rudely deflected from his pious and thoughtful course? How is one to explain, without violence to what we believe is established today about Luther's early development, the sudden transformation from a Christian, absorbed in his private devotions, into a popular leader exhorting and directing multitudes? If it is true that the affair of the indulgences was the prelude, the overture to the drama of the Reformation, and that it constitutes the first link in a chain of events leading from Wittenberg to Worms, then one is certainly justified in treating the affair as more than an episode and devoting it such space as would properly fall to events so decisive as those of the year 1517.

I

We are beginning now to understand these events. Better now than twenty years ago. Better, obviously, than Luther ever understood them himself.

First of all, thanks especially to the discoveries of Schulte in 1904,[1] we can reconstruct with some accuracy the story of what may be called, with the reader's permission, the "Hohenzollern candidacy" to the archbishopric of Mainz, which led on inevitably to the question of indulgences. We know how, on August 30, 1513, Albert, younger brother of Joachim, Elector of Brandenburg, was chosen archbishop of Magdeburg by the cathedral chapter, and how shortly afterward, September 9, he was appointed by the chapter of Halberstadt to administer that diocese. That was no great scandal from the point of view of the Papal court. For when all was said, if Albert of Brandenburg held two bishoprics, he was only following in that the example of his predecessor: the latter, Ernest of Saxony, had held Magdeburg and Halberstadt simultaneously.[2] And his age?

It is true that the new incumbent was young. He was barely twenty-four. But what of that? Leo X, then pope, had received the tonsure at the age of seven; at eight he was Archbishop of Aix and held the rich abbey of Passignano; at thirteen a cardinal's hat. Indeed the delegates

[1] A. Schulte, *Die Fugger in Rom*, t. I, Leipzig, 1904, ch. IV, p. 93 *sqq.*
[2] The union continued after Albert's death.

whom Joachim and Albert sent to Rome as a sequel to this double election made short work of the matter. On January 9, 1514, the bishops of Lübeck and of Brandenburg were ordered to confer on Albert the pallium.

Whereupon it befel that on February 9, 1514, the Archbishop of Mainz, Uriel von Gemmingen, died. Now it happened unfortunately that three prelates in rapid succession had followed one another in the Rhenish archbishopric. They had died respectively in 1504, 1508 and 1514. At each new succession there were intolerable fees to be paid to the court at Rome! The once well-garnished purses of Mainz were now lean from the outpouring of these vast sums. Imagine, then, the annoyance occasioned by Uriel's death and the irritation of the folk of the diocese at the thought of all this good Rhenish gold taking wing to the other side of the Alps to enrich a detested Italy.

On March 7, 1514, Albert of Brandenburg had his name proposed for the archbishopric to the canons of Mainz. The Hohenzollerns were pushing their fortunes. It should be remembered that the archbishop of Mainz was also an elector, a chancellor of the Empire, president of the electoral college and primate of Germany. Without, as had been traditionally affirmed, taking any formal and duly registered oath, Joachim's representative let it be understood by the chapter of Mainz that if the Hohenzollern was chosen the charges for the dispensation, the confirmation, and the *pallium* should not fall on the diocese. On March 9, 1514, Albert was elected.

It remained to get the election confirmed by Rome. Two archbishoprics and a bishopric for one man, a young man still well under thirty. Two archbishoprics, too, of such weight! That was rather a poser. There was some dearth of precedents. Nor was somebody wanting at Rome to stress the point: Cardinal Lang, who himself wished to take Magdeburg and Halberstadt, leaving Albert only Mainz. But the question was half political. By permitting an accretion of offices, the Roman Curia, who believed they were on the eve of a Papal election, would acquire at one stroke the grateful support of two electors in the College of the Seven. Then there were financial considerations; the Hohenzollerns bearing this in mind got in touch with the Fuggers.

Jacob Fugger the Rich, a financial genius, had based the unprecedented prosperity of his house upon immense and very varied interests—textiles, mines, and ultimately banking transactions. Transactions in Rome were his special forte. Usurping the place of the Italian bankers, as Schulte made clear back in 1904, he had little by little achieved a monopoly of all the business between the Curia and the German dioceses. It was only natural that he should concern himself with the very considerable interests of the Hohenzollerns in 1514. The matter, in fact, did not lag. On August 18, 1514, Albert was declared Archbishop of Mainz by the Pope in consistory. He was to pay, besides the regular 14,000 ducats for the confirmation, a "voluntary contribution" of 10,000 ducats, to the end that he might keep Magdeburg and Halberstadt along

with Mainz. Jacob Fugger advanced the money. The question of indulgences did not come up till later.

But let us pause here a moment. Here was an "abuse," of a sort theretofore unknown. It occurred in August, 1514, and was never a secret. It is useless to argue that combining benefices was the normal or the accepted thing, or that twenty-four years was not extremely young for a prelate. For never before had two archbishoprics, such important ones, too, in every respect as those of Mainz and Magdeburg, been united in the hands of one man with a bishopric for good measure. Indeed Joachim and Albert were at a great loss to find precedents to support their inordinate claim.

All this Luther knew. He couldn't have failed to know it. He was doubtless ignorant of some details, of some of the negotiations and compensations involved. But the outcome was plain to all. A perfect chance for a monk to speak out if he were obsessed by the miserable state of the Church and eager to attack abuses. Luther said not a word. Not one. Not in 1514; nor in the following years; nor in 1517 at the time of the affair of the indulgences. And this silence is noteworthy.

It was formerly said and believed that Albert, in order to pay off the Fuggers with other people's money, asked leave to preach indulgences, in the name of the Pope, in his dioceses and in the domains of Joachim. But that is an error. The preaching of indulgences was proposed by the Curia to representatives of the Hohenzollerns, who received the suggestions coldly. However, they had to

accept. A bull published March 31, 1515, makes it clear that half the amount realized was to go to the Papal coffers and the other half should be Albert's to use in discharging his debt to the Fuggers. But Emperor Maximilian the "Penniless" got wind of the deal. He intervened and demanded his split. From the money derived from the three (not eight) years of preaching indulgences he was to receive as his share 1,000 florins, the balance being then divided evenly between Albert and the Pope. Be it said furthermore that the preaching of indulgences could not have lasted more than two years. It brought in little. After every deduction was made Albert realized only half the amount of his contribution of 10,000 ducats. The preaching did not begin till early in 1517. Not till then did the Dominican, John Tetzel, as a vicar general of the archbishop of Mainz, begin publishing to the faithful the whole graduated series of incomparable promised favors.

Here too let us pause an instant. Of the negotiations at the court of Rome which preceded the final issuing of the bull on indulgences Martin Luther was ignorant. He even somewhere pretends to have been ignorant at the start that Albert of Brandenburg was behind Tetzel; but this no doubt was a diplomatic ignorance. But could he have been surprised by the absolute novelty of the event when Tetzel, getting under weigh, began his leisurely journey with all the paraphernalia of a wine merchant through the Magdeburg diocese and through Joachim's territories? Emphatically no.

First of all Tetzel did not, as was formerly affirmed,

come to Wittenberg to beard Luther in his den. Wittenberg was within the territories of the elector of Saxony, Frederick the Wise; and this prince was not disposed to permit the preaching of papal indulgences in his territories. Was he then a Lutheran by anticipation? No, merely an advocate of the well-known principle that charity should begin at home. Frederick's piety, then, was perfectly traditional. In the years just preceding the Reformation he seemed chiefly concerned with assembling at Wittenberg a collection of holy relics that would draw pilgrims to his city.[3] He was seeking them everywhere; he was buying and making exchanges—pieces of the swaddling bands of the infant Jesus, bits of straw from the manger, locks of hair from the Holy Virgin, drops of the milk from her breast, fragments of nails or of rods that had figured in the Passion. These signal treasures were increasingly fruitful as a source of indulgences. One assured one's self the benefits appertaining thereto by visiting the relics preserved in the Schlosskirche on the Monday after the Sunday of Misericordia. One could also, by means of an offering made on All Saints' day after having confessed, obtain plenary indulgence from the Portiuncula: *indulgentia ab omni culpa at pæna.*

Thus Luther at Wittenberg did not need to wait for the "Tetzel scandal" to learn the tricks of the preachers of indulgences—and of that kind of graft. But wasn't

[3] Concerning this aspect of Frederick, cf. Scheel, *M. Luther*, II, ch. II, p. 169 *sqq.* (especially according to Kalkoff, *Ablass und Reliquienverechrung an der Schloss Kirche zu Wittemberg*, Gotha, 1907).

Tetzel more cynical? Did he not declare brazenly to the gaping bystanders that the moment their money fell into his coffer the soul that should be set free was released from Purgatory and flew straight up to Heaven?

*Sobald das Geld in Kasten Klingt,*
*Die Seele aus dem Fegfeuer springt!*

In truth, without the least wish to belittle John Tetzel's notorious charlatanry, one may venture to doubt that he first invented this jingle. Let us open the first of the great folios in which Du Plessis d'Argentré made his imposing record of the judgments of the Paris faculty of theology. Here we learn in detail without need for further search that in 1482 the Sorbonne considered and condemned a proposition submitted to it which reads, when divested of Latin: "Any soul in Purgatory takes wing at once for Heaven, is relieved, that is, from all pain, the moment that one of the faithful places a *pièce de six blancs*, as a supporting contribution or alms, in the coffer for the repairs of the Saint-Pierre de Saintes church."[4] That was what an unidentified ecclesiastic was condemned for preaching, long before 1517. The censure, moreover, did not prevent the repetition of the offense; on May 6, 1518, the Sorbonne was forced to return to the charge and to characterize the same proposition as false and scandalous. Clearly Tetzel was no innovator.

[4] Du Plessis d'Argentré, *Collectio Judiciorum* of *Novis Erroribus*, I, p. 306 *sqq.*

As for what he was preaching—plenary remission of all sins for those who, having with a contrite heart made oral confession and visited seven revered churches and recited in each five Paters and five Aves, should give to the fund for indulgences an offering in accordance with their wealth and social rank and varying from twenty-five golden florins for princes to half a florin or even nothing at all for the common run. This implied the right to choose a confessor from the regular or secular clergy and obtain from him once in the course of life and again at the point of death, as often as the occasion should arise, a plenary indulgence and absolution not only for ordinary but also for special sins: provided that in this latter case a payment of not less than a quarter of a florin was made. Last of all, a plenary remission of the sins of any souls in Purgatory, in consideration of offerings graduated as above. Such were the three principal favors that Tetzel sold to benevolent subscribers. In all this there was nothing out of the way, nothing which was not normal and in conformity with the notions and practices of the times . . . Well, then? This sudden outcry? This outburst provoked, it was claimed, by an unheard of scandal without precedent or analogy?

II

Actually, since accepted judgments impose themselves with such force upon even the well-informed and the enlightened, it is even more necessary than usual in this case to reconstruct, thoroughly and in full accord with what

seems to be established about Luther's inner development in the years 1515, 1516 and 1517, the story of a crisis that was none the less epoch-making because it was wholly subjective.

In 1515 and 1516, as the notes for the lectures on the Epistle to the Romans make clear, Luther found himself intellectually. The experience was so beneficial to him and so much an occasion for private thanksgiving, that he had no doubt of the general efficacy of his principle or the need of imparting it to all and sundry. But to whom specifically? First of all the students in his classes. To the people to whom he preached. To theologians also, and to learned men, his peers, his former masters, his disciples . . . And so, little by little, he achieved the position of a founder of a school. In September 1517 we find him outlining and causing to be discussed in his presence by a candidate, Bernhardi von Feldkirchen, theses (*de viribus et voluntate hominis sine gratia*) the mere titles of which are an evidence of his emancipation from Gabrielist doctrines and from Aristoteleanism.[4] Exactly a year later we find him, in September 1517, once more presiding at a disputation *Contra Scholasticam theologiam* and outlining theses which are in fact a complete skeleton of Luther's own doctrine.[5]

Man, being like a rotten tree (*arbor mala factus*) can will and do only evil. His will is not free but enslaved. To say that he can by his own efforts rise to the peak of loving

[4] W., I, p. 142; E., *op. var. arg.*, I, 235 *sqq.* (1865).
[5] W., I, p. 221; cf. Strohl II, 169 *sqq.*

God above all else is a lie and an illusion (*terminus fictus, sicut Chimera*). By his very nature man can only love God egotistically. This is all a flat repudiation of Scotist and Gabrielist doctrines. And, as if to obviate any doubt on that point, at the end of each thesis such indications appear as: *contra Scotum, contra Gabrielum, contra dictum commune* . . . Then came philosophic theses. And here, with the same unqualified emphasis, Luther proclaims his distaste for Aristotle—for his metaphysics, his logic, his ethics: "The execrable Aristotelean ethics is the absolute mortal enemy of grace (the scholastics to the contrary notwithstanding!)" "It is false to say that Aristotle's theory of happiness coincides with the Christian doctrine (*contra morales*!)." "A theologian who is not a logician is a monstrous heretic: this proposition itself is monstrous and heretical." After which Luther concluded by developing his favorite theme, the basic opposition between the law and grace: "Every act that conforms with the law even in the absence of grace has the look of a good act; on nearer inspection it is only a sin." "Cursed be those who conform with the law merely; blessed be those who accomplish works of grace." "The true, life-giving law for the Christian is not the dead law of Leviticus or the Decalog; it is the love of God with which our hearts may be filled by the Holy Spirit."

Thus argues Luther in 1516 and 1517. With a full and profound sincerity. But also, perhaps, with a tincture of local university pride, some notion of opposing a Wittenberg doctrine or school of thought to the teaching of the

rival institutions at Erfurt, at Leipzig, and Frankfurt am Oder, and elsewhere . . . Moreover, Luther disseminates Gunther's theses of 1517, gives them currency, sends copies to his friends, forwards them to acquaintances at Erfurt. He feels that the time is ripe to challenge a criticism of his ideas by the masters. If some are not instantly won, arguments will ensue. And Luther is confident of convincing them. He has God with him, in his heart, now afire with faith, in his conscience, now assured and at peace.

* * *

Gunther's theses date from September, 1517. The theses about indulgences, from October, 1517. On October 31, 1517, on the side door of the chapel at Wittenberg, Luther posted a notice in Latin: "For the love of truth, and from zeal for its triumph, the following propositions will be discussed at Wittenberg. The Reverend Father Martin Luther, Master of Arts, Doctor of Sacred Theology and a regular professor at the University, will preside. He begs that those who cannot be present at the oral discussion will communicate in writing. In the name of Our Lord Jesus Christ, *Amen.*" The subject? *Pro declaratione virtutis indulgentiarum.*[6] Was it Tetzel, then?

Doubtless. But first notice the date. October 31, 1517, was All Saints' eve. And on All Saints' day each year countless pilgrims assembled at Wittemberg to gain pardons by visiting the relics so dear to the heart—and so

[6] W., I, p. 299; cf. Strohl II, 223 *sqq.*

profitable to the purse—of Frederick the Wise. There is not the least doubt that Tetzel was preaching indulgences. But in point of fact Wittenberg was as deeply affected.

Was it Tetzel then? But read the notice posted by Luther. Were there any violent attacks on this peddler of holy wares, any vehement denunciation of his particular article, the indulgence emanating from Saint Peter's in Rome and sold for the meagre advantage of Albert of Brandenburg? No, the theses attacked the indulgences in the essence and fundamentally, as a betrayal of sinners who derived thence a false sense of security. The allegation appears not once in a single article but repeatedly throughout the placard at each new stage in the progress of Luther's outline. "When he said, Repent, Our Lord Jesus Christ meant that for the faithful all life should be a repentance." This is his first thesis. "Christians must be taught to follow Christ, their leader, through torments, through death and Hell, and to enter Heaven through much tribulation (Acts XIV, 22) instead of resting in a false sense of security." These are the two last, the ninety-fourth and the ninety-fifth theses. They epitomize the whole series of Luther's affirmations. And they connect his theory about indulgences with the utmost rigor to the body of his general doctrine and his whole conception of the Christian life. Thus the ninety-five theses of October 31 become a special application, a precise corollary, of the ninety-seven theses of September 4. Which reveals in a flash the exact importance of Tetzel. He was used as a pretext merely.

There is one of the ninety-five theses, an article 39, in which it is easy to discern an element of personal confession and self-revelation on Luther's part. "It is an extraordinarily difficult thing," he says, "for even the most able theologians, to make people understand simultaneously the efficacy of indulgences and the necessity of contrition." And article 40, which follows, adds: "The genuinely contrite love suffering and invite it; but indulgence, on the other hand, remits penances and encourages an aversion to them." How clear and how eloquent! Here we see the intimate workings of Luther's mind, his reflections upon the question which is brutally presented to his mind, and even more to his conscience as a preacher, by this violent conflict between incompatible theories. This is where the dispute on indulgences bears upon Luther's notion of true religion. But in view of this vital connection is it possible that such a man, one who was always searching his heart, remained unaware of this difficulty until Tetzel's advent?

I know that is what he affirmed in 1541, in the evening of his life, in a portion of his polemic against Henry of Brunswick: *Wider Hans Worst*. The text is familiar:[7] "Seeing that crowds were going from Wittenberg to Jutterbock, to Zerbst, and elsewhere, in quest of indulgences and *being conscious also that Christ had redeemed me without my then knowing any better than others the real error of indulgences*, I began to preach mildly that there

[7] Cf. the extracts from Luther of Goguel, Paris, 1925, p. 42-43.

was a better and surer way than purchasing pardons . . ." A summary account, hasty and inaccurate. It was reasonable enough that the aged Luther should thus frame his hasty retrospect. It is not permissible for us to take him literally. For Luther is mistaken. It is just because he already knew "better than others" the real error of indulgences that he spoke out then, without regard for the prudence which his respect for a prince like Frederick would have recommended to him, for Frederick was keen for indulgences and avaricious of the profits arising therefrom. For proof one has only to open the first volume of the Weimar annotated edition.

* * *

1516. An extract from a sermon preached the tenth Sunday after Trinity.[8] Subject: indulgences. The gist: "The deputies and sub-deputies who are preaching indulgences do nothing but vaunt their benefits to the people and excite them to buy. You never hear them explaining to their audiences what the indulgence really is, or how it applies, or what its effects are. Little do they care if deluded Christians imagine themselves to be saved the moment they have paid for their scrap of parchment . . . " And what follows is particularly interesting. This conflict which the thirty-ninth article of the ninety-five theses called attention to, this antagonism between the special efficacy of indulgences and the efficacy of contrition is here set forth specifically and expounded by Luther

[8] W., I, p. 65.

in quite personal terms. The distinction is made here between the *infusio* which is *intrinseca* and the *remissio* which is *extrinseca*, being only the remission of the temporal penance, the canonical penance to which the priest has condemned the offender. This must be accomplished on earth; whoever dies before performing it will discharge it in purgatory; and if the Pope remits it, this is not by the power of the keys to bind and to loose but by applying to that end the intercession of the whole church. But still there is a difficulty: does God accept such a remission of a part or the whole? Luther says: "To affirm the efficacy of such indulgences to redeem souls from Purgatory is to overstep." And even at this date, 1516, he adds the following, a passage commonly cited as a part of the 1517 document: "The Pope is cruel indeed if, having the power to release souls from Purgatory, he does not yield freely to all souls in torment what he grants to the privileged in return for money." [9] . . .

The interest of this brief passage of 1516 can hardly be overestimated. It makes plain to us Luther's mental travail in these years of profound upheaval and germination. Instead of being a sermon or a dissertation, it is rather a succession of questions that the Augustinian was asking himself. And at times he confesses ignorance. For example: "You will say, Complete contrition makes penance superfluous, then what end do indulgences serve? The perfectly contrite soul flies at once to heaven, *statim evolat*" . . . I

[9] *Alioquin, Papa est crudelis si hoc miseris animabus non concedit gratis, quod potest, pro pecunia necessaria ad Ecclesiam, concedere.*

reply: "I confess my ignorance. Yes, the perfectly contrite soul is saved without indulgences; and all the indulgences in the world will not save the soul that is not thus repentant. What good are they, then, to be sure, these indulgences?" . . . But already the outcome is plain: "Have a care. Lest indulgences engender in us a false security, a sinful inertia, the loss of spiritual grace!" Tetzel as an historical figure was still unborn when Luther indited these lines. As also at the time he formulated this other far-reaching question: "But what guarantee have we that God will ratify what the Pope proposes? . . . *Quis certis est, quod ita Deus acceptat sicut petitur?"*

1516. The middle of the year. On October 31, exactly a year to the day before the ninety-five theses were posted, —on October 31, on the eve of the great day of pardons at Wittenberg,—Martin Luther preached a sermon on indulgences.[10] The same line of argument. Already familiar from Luther's standpoint, for he says at the start: *"Dixi de iis, alias, plura." Alias?* No doubt in the chapel of the Augustinians? For the rest, the same thought inspired both this sermon and the ninety-five theses.

## III

The ninety-five theses, then, were not a new propaganda, or a call to arms, or the impulsive utterance of a man to whom an apparent and quite unexpected scandal

[10] W., I, p. 94. The year of the sermon, preached on October 31, is not given. Some say 1517; the editors of the Weimar edition, 1516.

is suddenly revealed. They were merely one manifestation of a purpose that Luther had formed before Tetzel appeared or Albert of Brandenburg's accumulation of offices had become a public question—the application, to a special case which could not fail to present itself to the mind and conscience of Luther, of the principles he had evolved and the views he had formed. They were furthermore a reiteration with more force, more breadth, more assurance, of ideas that for two years at least had continually haunted Luther's restless mind and agitated his "untiring and strident" spirit. As for Albert of Brandenburg, Tetzel, the impious sermons at Zerbst, at Jutterbock and elsewhere—these were only pretexts. Or occasions, if one prefers. The protest of October 31 was not an instant response to a Papal bull (there were, in fact, scores that conceded indulgences); it sprang from the inner labor that Martin Luther had expended on Martin Luther.

It cannot be denied that the act of this Augustinian in this autumn of 1517 was fruitful of consequences. But was it a revolutionary gesture? To say so is now a ritual. *Ex post facto,* because we know history. And that is not wholly an error. For Luther had refrained from printing his sermons of 1516 and 1517 on indulgences. But he sent a copy of the ninety-five theses, which were soon to be printed, with a categoric letter to the Archbishop of Brandenburg.[11] Not a declaration of war. But a warning. Yes, a severe call to order in the name of God. The applica-

[11] End., I, No. 48, p. 113 *sqq.*

tion of those ideas, which, as we already know, he formulated in 1512 in the sermon written for the provost of Leitzkau. Neither in the theses nor in the letter to Albert does Luther indulge in abuse or furious outcry. On the contrary. He shows for the charlatans who impose on the faithful a sort of disdainful consideration. "My object is not so much to condemn their clamor (for I have never heard one of their sermons) as it is to root out the false ideas which they plant in the minds of their auditors." [12] This sort of serenity was evidence of a singular strength and if Albert of Brandenburg had been a good judge of men he would doubtless have hesitated to denounce the monk and to launch an attack on him.

* * *

Was it revolutionary, this document of October 31. Yes and no. In its form, its tenor, its degree of brutality, I believe not. But here too comparisons are in order. It was revolutionary, certainly, when that Jean Lallier, priest and master of arts, bachelor in theology, proclaimed in his *Sorbonique*, in 1484, that "the Pope has not the power to grant to pilgrims in the form of indulgences the remission of all of the penance they owed on account of their sins, even if these indulgences are apportioned justly and wisely." [13] He added that the decrees and decretals of the Popes were nothing but pitfalls and snares, *"non sunt nisi*

[12] Non adeo accuso prœdicatorum exclamationes, quas non audivi; sed deleo falsissimas intelligentias populi ex illis conceptas (End., I, 115).

[13] D'Argentré, *Collectio Judiciorum*, I, 308; Renaudet, *Préréforme et Humanisme*, 1916, p. 108.

*truphae.*" He anticipated Luther's doctrines on the universal priesthood: he declared that the church of Rome was not the chief over the other churches, that the marriage of priests was permissible and (an evidence of the critical spirit which should interest an historian in passing) "that one is not bound to believe the legends about the saints any more than the Croniques de France." This Lallier extricated himself from his difficulties by abjuring his errors (pretending coolly that he had not known that Wycliff was a heretic!). The Bishop of Paris absolved him, to the scandal of the Sorbonne.

Fourteen years later, in 1498, a much more famous man, the Franciscan Jean Vitrier, who is known to have influenced Erasmus, was informed against at the Sorbonne for having professed, among other notoriously scandalous views, the following, "that one ought not to give money for pardons" and that "pardons come from Hell." [14] Panurge, in his broadest moments of license, never went to that length. And Martin Luther, on October 31, 1517, took care to avoid such language. Though censured, Vitrier ended his life in tranquillity in his monastery at Saint-Omer. . . .

There are two examples, among many others, which will aid us to arrive at an accurate estimate of the audacity of a gesture which was bold, to be sure, but not without calculation. However,—and this is precisely his strength,

[14] D'Argentré, *Collectio Judiciorum*, I, 340; Renaudet, *Préréforme et Humanisme*, p. 297.

—Luther did not rest content with emitting one violent cry or making one sweeping protest and stopping at that. Luther posted ninety-five theses. Behind these theses were ten years of his life, ten years of heroic effort to achieve peace of mind. And it wasn't merely a "doctrine" that he was defending. The poverty of our language constrains us to use inappropriate words. Behind his protestations and affirmations of 1517, Luther put his whole self, body and soul. Behind them he put a man and the sort of man whom nothing in heaven or earth could force to retract, for in the heart of this man lived a God, *his* God, whom he felt and touched every instant: a God from whom he derived his strength by confessing, by confiding to Him, his weakness and wretchedness.

Formerly, since the posting of the theses was a gesture of revolt against a specific abuse, it was customary to seek some answerable precedent for it. Such a precedent was found, or invented, in the emotional disturbance that the young Luther was supposed to have experienced in Rome. But now? It is no longer difficult to conceive the young Luther, theretofore absorbed in his solitary meditation, rising up to announce—what precisely? His revolt against abuses? No. Rather, his profound, indestructible, and enlightened faith in a doctrine achieved at the cost of some effort, salutary above all others and alone consoling, a doctrine from which stupid, nay criminal people, were striving to deflect Christian minds. A cataclysm, the affair of indulgences? Not at all. An occasion for an affirmation.

The logical outcome, the necessary conclusion of all the monk's mental effort from the time of his entrance into the monastery of Erfurt.

But no one who raises a cry ever knows what echoes his voice will awaken. On November 1, 1517, no one came to dispute with the Reverend Father Martin. But in a few days, the ninety-five theses were reprinted, translated into German, hawked about everywhere, awakening, to the monk's great surprise, a response whose accent and volume profoundly disquieted him. The voice of a troubled Germany, incoherently agitated by ill-governed passions, awaiting only a man and a sign to publish its secret desires.

A decisive moment—the moment when, facing Martin Luther at the front of the stage, his nameless collaborator, the Germany of 1517, whose part in the work will be to unceasingly broaden it, advances stored with conflicting energies. Him it is we must thank for the birth and also for the miscarriage of the original work, the work which was all of one piece as a monk conceived it inside him, but decidedly motley in the realization which historically he endorsed.

# CHAPTER V

## LUTHER AND THE GERMANY OF 1517

IT is commonly not said, but none the less noteworthy, that if there was one country which offered a particularly discouraging outlook to reform and to a reformer at the beginning of the sixteenth century, it was Germany.

Bountiful lands, great material resources, proud and splendid cities, everywhere active industry, initiative, wealth—such was Germany in 1517. But there was no unity, either moral or political. There was anarchy. A thousand confused and often opposed desires; deep dissatisfaction with a situation that was troubled and in some quarters humiliating; complete inability, moreover, to apply the remedy. Let us not repeat, to no purpose, what so many reliable authors have told us about this, but let us refresh our minds briefly on whatever may conduce to a better understanding of the present story. In a corner of this Germany in 1517 was living a man, an obscure, unknown monk, who would probably not have rated a mention of five lines in a general work of Augustinian biography. This man, in a few months, was to become a national hero. It is worth while to ask one's self what could have been predicted, from a careful survey of the

political and moral map of the Germany of this period, with regard to the possibilities of such an achievement and its chances of lasting success.

## I

Germany was a land without unity: that was what mattered most. There were Germans,—numerous strong, active,—many Germans speaking closely related dialects, having manners, customs, ways of living and thinking for the most part in common. These Germans were a nation in the mediæval sense of the word. They were not, however, all closely grouped in a centralized and well unified State, a body politic responding harmoniously to the direction of a single brain.

In a Europe in which the monarchical organization was becoming increasingly prevalent, Germany had remained without any national sovereign. Unlike France and England, Germany had no king. The French and the British monarchs were rich. Their authority was recognized. They could in a crisis rally all the energies of their kingdoms to their aid and the aid of their dynasties. The German Emperor meanwhile was only a name. The Empire had ceased to be more than a gaunt skeleton which hung with a strangling weight about the neck of the unfortunate and often actually impoverished man who might chance to be raised to the futile eminence by a vote obtained through the vulgarest barter and sale.

In a period when the value of money was becoming

apparent, a period described in Ehrenberg's standard work,[1] the Emperor as such was a pauper. He no longer derived any substantial revenue from his empire. Not the "value of a nut," said Granvelle, less than certain German bishops derived from their dioceses. The vast imperial domains, in which the power of the Franks and Saxons had consisted, had melted away. The kingly rights, the right to levy contributions, all that might have sustained a financial policy, was conceded, alienated, usurped. And yet, more than any monarch of his day, this prince of the resounding title, cut off from his revenues by all the arts known to political assemblies, had need to be wealthy in order to reign. For, as the incumbent of an eminent office which was not hereditary like a kingship but was rather conferred electively on a Christian prince, who was no more necessarily a German than the Pope was an Italian, this emperor, oppressed by the weight of a heavy crown transmitted to him from an all too encumbering past, had to be everywhere and concern himself about everything, Germany and the whole world as well. If his authority in Germany grew every day more precarious, it was partly because his very greatness and the antiquity of his office tied his hands. It left him helpless to deal with the true masters of Germany, the cities and local princelings.

The princes had one great advantage over the Emperor. They were men with one purpose and of one territory.

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[1] *Das Zeitalter der Fugger*, 3rd ed., Jena, 1922.

They had no need to follow world politics or mix in affairs of the Church. Italy had no hold on them. To be sure they did not disdain to make fruitful journeys to Italy from time to time. But they did not go there like the emperors to pursue chimerical visions or will-o'-the-wisps. While the Cæsars, which some of these princelings took pains to manufacture at Frankfurt, were ruining themselves with silly and fruitless adventures, the princes themselves had only one care, the prosperity of their houses and the wealth of their dynasties. At the end of the fifteenth and the beginning of the sixteenth century they were everywhere especially active in promoting political and territorial concentration in Germany. Several of them, taking advantage of favoring circumstances and lucky accidents, were engaged in creating substantial states, states less scrappy than heretofore. In the Palatinate, in Wurttemberg, in Bavaria, in Hesse, in Brandenburg, and in Mecklinburg, and elsewhere, most of the houses which were destined to play a primary rôle in German history were displaying at the beginning of the sixteenth century a new vigor and beginning to rally their energies for impending conquests.

The future then appeared to belong to the German princelings alone. Lacking any sovereign really worthy of the name at its head, Germany appeared to be tending towards a regional organization under eight or ten heads, towards some such number of well consolidated states, each effectively administered and subject each to one will. But that organization had not yet been attained. Above

the princes there was still the Emperor. Their sovereignties were tributary to his. And under them, or rather parallel with them, there were (not to mention the outlawed robber barons) the cities.[2]

* * *

The glorious German cities of the early sixteenth century! Foreigners who traveled in Germany could see nothing else. The magnificence of the cities quite dazzled their eyes. Twenty capitals, each possessed of its own institutions, its arts, its industries, its costumes, its peculiar *esprit*. The southern cities! The Augsburg of the Fuggers, the gateway to the commerce with Italy, a picturesque foretaste, with its painted and frescoed houses, of the country beyond the Alps. Better yet Nuremberg, the city of Dürer, of Fischer, of Hans Sachs, of Martin Behaim, lying at the foot of its citadel midway between the Main and the Danube. And also the northern cities: the realistic industrious Hamburg, a city unburdened by scruples, just beginning its splendid rise; Lübeck, the already declining Queen of Hansa; Strettin, the wheat city, and far-off Danzig, with its vast edifices, its big brick churches, the emblems of its unfailing prosperity. On the eastern front, Frankfurt-am-Oder, a depot for the traffic with Poland; Breslau, the natural port of Silesia. To the east on the turbulent river, the constellation of Rhenish cities from Cologne to Basel; back of that the Frankfurt caravanserai;

[2] We shall not give references. It would be necessary to cite a whole library.

and still further back, Leipzig, a crossroads at the heart of this manifold Germany.

In these stirring, populous, glorious cities, a boundless prosperity levied contribution from every conceivable source. An incomparably robust and active citizenry. The Turk, seizing Constantinople in 1517, dealt a death blow to the Far Eastern commerce of the southern cities through Venice. But already the cities and citizens had changed front. In 1503 the Welsers of Augsburg had opened a powerful banking house in Lisbon; in 1505 three German vessels in a Portuguese fleet set sail for the Indies. The Ehingers of Constance, along with the Welsers, were dreaming of Venezuela; the Fuggers, of Chile. Anvers, the metropolis of the new trading Europe, overflowed with Germans. And more: the city which furnished navigators with the best compasses and the most reliable maps, the city where Regiomontanus, while awaiting his disciple Behaim, perfected the astrolabe, was bringing German astronomy into relation with Spanish and Portuguese nautical science, by informing the world in 1475 of the ephemerides which were to guide Columbus on his voyage—that too was a Germany city, the glorious Nuremberg.

In the land of the Fuggers,—the *"Foucres,"* at once admired and detested,—colossal fortunes were being piled up at will. Men by the hundreds, stout merchants full of courage and confidence in themselves, braving hardships for solid enjoyments, were tasting the joys of life. Theirs

the gold plate, the visible sign of their wealth; theirs, the groaning boards, the heavy carved-wood furnishings, the Flemish tapestries, the brown Italian leathers; on the corner of a table, a vase from Murano, and often, on a shelf, beside a terrestial sphere, a few books. These men were the kings of a new world. They had overthrown the old scale of values. The cities from which they came were the pride of Germany. And its weakness also.

* * *

Planted in the middle of principalities, these cities intersect and disorganize them, impede their expansion, prevent their consolidation. But is expansion possible either for them? No. Federation? Not that either. Encircling their walls are the fields, a country-side ruled by a law which the law of the cities negates. Outside, rude and barbarous peasants under greedy masters, wretched often to the point of revolt, cursing under their yoke, complete strangers, anyway, to the urban culture, a race so bizarre that the painters and engravers never tire of recording their wild appearance, their primitive habits. If the cities wish to coöperate and arrive at agreements, it can only be done across wide stretches of country, vast heterogeneous territories which contrast with them strikingly in every particular. These urban cultures, for all their prestige, are cultural islands. These cities are captives, doomed to isolation and exposed to the jealous scrutiny not alone of the princes but also of one another.

To what ends do they devote their riches and their resources? To the arsenals which are their pride but also their ruin. To artillerists, to exacting technicians, whose services are very dear. To ramparts and bastions needing always repairs, and, from time to time, requiring complete reconstruction. Then there is the cost of ambassadors to be sent on long diplomatic journeys and of endless couriers posting furiously on the high roads. Free cities! Their liberty is too dearly bought. For in spite of every sacrifice they are weak and at the mercy of any prince who may choose to station himself on the river above or below them to prey on their commerce, any robber baron who cares to defy and plunder them and retreat to his eagle crags beyond reach of the urban militia, any rival city whose jealousy may occasion constant ruptures and treacheries.

Beneath the brave show of prosperity was inherent weakness, a political weakness all the more surprising in contrast with such economic power. How wholly lacking in these cities, which so far outshone the French cities of the period, was that political sense and national feeling which in times of crisis rallied all the good cities of France to the royal standard, as when they sustained Louis XI against the men of the *Bien Publique* or Charles VIII against the nobles. They were parts of a well ordered whole, these French cities. Their culture radiated throughout the surrounding country, urbanising it in their image. In Germany on the other hand—terrible unremitting strife and unbridled egotism.

From such a condition the Germans were bound to suffer, however much they might pride themselves on their wealth, their business acumen, their triumphs. They suffered because their country was divided and consisted of fragments only and disjointed members without chief or head: a confused aggregation of autonomous cities and more or less powerful dynasties.

A remedy? No one desired it. Increase of power for the emperor? Not so. The cities said no. For what, in that case, would become of their liberties? Besides, it would cost them money. The princes also said no. It was all very well to perpetuate a species of honorary president whose preëminence guaranteed that no one of them should excede the others to the point of becoming their master. If they had not had this they would even have had to invent it. But to make a real emperor of this figurehead—that would never do!

There was not one but dozens of projects of political reform brought to light in the Empire at the end of the fifteenth century. Dozens of more or less serious elucubrations, more or less well considered proposals, plans even for a constitution emanating from lawyers, from theologians, from princes or from the Emperor himself. But none was successful. The more talk there was of increasing the power of the Emperor, of creating an imperial army, imperial courts of justice, a sound and effective imperial system of finances, the more in the end was the emperor subjected to restrictions and insults. In vain did Maximilian invoke the honor of the Holy Roman Empire and affirm

the necessity of repelling the Turk or exacting respect from the French: the diets made a jest of the honor of the Holy Roman Empire and declined to worry about the Turk; as for France, some were friendly to her for reasons best known to themselves. The only enemy they feared was precisely—the Emperor.

Is it not plain enough how difficult it would be in such a country to bring about a reform by political means, at least, or, should we say, by the conquest of governmental power, and how any such enterprise was doomed from the start?

The Emperor's aid? But was that to be won? Would he, the Pope's rival but also his champion, let himself be won over? But that would not be enough, just to win the Emperor. The princes too would be needed. All of them. For to win the Emperor without them, or them without the Emperor, or to allow them to become divided and so to divide the cities that were dominated by their influence, would be to shipwreck the enterprise, to arrest the reform, to spread discord everywhere, to multiply political rivalries and to fortify them with private and personal hatreds. And to unite in one purpose all these mutually incompatible autonomies, towns, princes, emperor, barons, clergy and laity would require of the reformer all the qualities of a political genius—all the talent, all the will to exploit rival passions, to foment rival interests, to bind all together in a single weapon, and to wield that weapon to a preconceived end.

It would not be difficult to destroy the Germany of

1517, so divided, so full of unrest. Conflicting local sentiments and anarchic passions would suffice to destroy what coherence there was. When it came to a positive work necessitating construction or reconstruction, what had the projectors of any new order to hope if they chose so barren a field, a country incapable of self discipline? A mere glance at the map seemed to furnish an all too eloquent answer.

II

And yet—if a man was strong enough, if his voice had the potency to move the Germans to their depths and to arouse them to a united exertion, if he had the power to inundate Germany with one of those irresistible tidal waves, which break down all barriers, sweep away all the dikes, swell their current actually with flotsam they carry away?

At first sigh it seemed perfectly possible to launch such a movement. That is, if the man could be found. For between the Rhine and the Vistula there had long been much outcry and general clamor for reform. In the disillusion that came from the failure of every successive plan for political organization, people's thoughts were turning apparently to religious reform. For might not such a reform prove to be common ground for all of these powers, big and little, who were cutting each others throats in Germany?

The Emperor? He had, with regard to the Pope, his traditional rôle to play, his ideas to affirm as the temporal

head of all Christendom, his authoritative word to speak. As for townsmen and peasants—it was they who were rather reluctantly footing the bill; and they knew how to haggle. The princes and barons, finally, beheld with a jealous eye the vast rich domains of the Church in Germany. They knew all about them. Each had at his disposal, for cadets of the house, an archbishopric, or a bishopric, or an abbacy. Each dreamed of securing, instead of life tenure, full hereditary and dynastic possession. . . .

And yet Rome had rebuffed every overture. Frederick III had obtained only the paltriest concessions from the Concordat of Vienna. Maximilian I fared no better, despite his fine scheme in 1511 to resolve all difficulties by combining the imperial crown and the pontifical tiara. All the negotiations had ultimately no effect except to make clear the ill will of the Curia. Disillusion, unrest, and general nervous tension prevailed. And the disturbance was taking the color of xenophobia.

Those Italians, who made fun of the good loyal Germans—those sharp, sly, disingenuous Italians, without faith or scruple, without depth or seriousness—those Italians who, on the pretext of serving the broad general interests of Christendom, served really only their own interests and drained Germany of so many fine ducats. Grievances accumulated. Once the step was taken, Martin Luther was destined to feel their influence. Keen antipathies deep down in the German heart, in the hearts of the German people. *"Es ist khein verachter Nation den die Deutsch!* No nation more scorned than Germany! Italy

calls us brutes; France and England despise us; the same with the others!" A cry from a wounded heart—it speaks many volumes.[3]

When, however, we examine with attention these reforming inclinations, these desires, these avowals, we discover that interests were involved whether consciously or unconsciously. And these interests, if not irreconcilable, were at least divergent. As for the emotional bias—Germany was no less anarchic in its moral conceptions than in its political organization.

There was, of course, in the cities the compact and relatively homogeneous mass of cultivated and intelligent burghers. But the state of their minds was complex at this period and, so far as we can judge, unstable.

To make money, that is, to devote one's life to acquisition, is to subject one's self to a moral influence. The city dweller, as his business prospered, was acquiring actual wealth, not a mere competency but wealth with all that wealth implies. And with overflowing coffers, jewels, rich fabrics, he was acquiring something quite different: a sense of his social importance, of his personal dignity, of his independence and power. In the Exchange at Anvers, just as in London and Lisbon, the rule was every man for himself. For that reason every man was learning to expect no support from outside and to take counsel only with himself.

Now the German city-dweller, in the beginning of the sixteenth century, was beginning to make money, a good

[3] *Tischreden*, W., II, 98, No. 1428, A.D. 1532: "Italia heist unst *bestias*."

deal of money. Especially the merchant. How irrelevant to such men, on whom fortune smiled, would appear the traditions of a world in which they were not held in honor; how inconvenient and even hostile would appear a system of morals that was suited to men of small substance. Such yokes they endured with impatience. They appeared illegitimate. For these men had broken so many bonds merely in the process of acquiring their money. As for instance: the ban upon lending at interest, on the hiring of money, perhaps. But that is only one thing; the effects were far-reaching.

The challenge in fact affected the whole state of mind of the mediæval craftsmen: the idea of trades, by which men might live but from which they derived no profit beyond the means to a bare subsistence; the notion of fair prices being maintained by the intervention of magistrates acting solely in the interests of the consumer—good quality and low prices: these conceptions still had a strong hold on the minds of the men of the sixteenth century, a hold that would not soon relax; and no doubt they have some hold still. But the new men, the representatives of a truly capitalistic spirit, registered violent opposition. Underselling, as an essential preliminary to extortion, the manipulation of prices; cornering and monopoly; adulteration and tampering with the scales; the cynical and unscrupulous exploitation of the poor—these were all ideas of the new school that flourished in those gilded capitals where the men of ten nations, all avid of riches, rubbed elbows and eagerly mastered new and subtler forms of chicane.

To all these the older restrictions, sponsored by the Church as the guardian of tradition and of established morality, were an awkward encumbrance.

They did not love the Church. It was in their way. It checked them and shook its rebuking finger at them. It treated them as bad children and even as a public menace. It had still the power to foment hatred, dislike, disapproval, and even to stir up demonstrations occasionally. For the revolution in morals of which these men were the harbingers, and which so far as they were concerned had already come to pass, had as yet gained but little hold upon minds and consciences. Many men there were, many women, too, who were growing fat by the practice of usury in the cities, exploiting the peasants abominably and practising artfully and persistently the latest forms of extortion, but who nevertheless were so swayed by old modes of thinking, so ignorant of the solidarity which binds together all those who engage in capitalistic exploitation that they were the first to complain of the big money lenders and merchants who were really their own unrecognized leaders and champions.

To the latter the Church, by the very nature of its organization and by reason of its secular conservatism, was a stumbling block and an offense. . . .

Every man for himself was the principle that prevailed in the economic struggle, in dealing with a rival, in seeking one's fortune. Why not also where God was concerned? Those priests and churchmen who mediated between man and God, those monks and nuns who withdrew from the

world, dedicating themselves to a life of austerity on the theory that God would apply to the credit of other men the merit acquired by their sacrifice—did all this mean anything to the wealthy merchant of Augsburg or Nuremberg? To what end all this piety? What were they to him, these loafers whose calm was a rebuke to the tumult of secular life. They pretended to mediate between God and His creatures. Presumptuous parasites! Did they imagine people couldn't get along without them? Every man for himself. Let them work instead of living by the sweat of other men's brows. Let them take a brace, roll up their sleeves and set to work on the common task. But above all let them cease to offer a mediation that was not demanded of them. Face to face with God, man will answer for his own acts. If the clergy were able to invoke obscure dogma and affirm that religion is too difficult for the laity to interpret, that was only because the clergy had made it complicated in order to create a demand for their services. True religion implied direct, clear, unmistakable converse between man and God, and between God and man.

That was how, confusedly still, yet with some coherence and an ever increasing force, not all, but a certain portion, of the city-dwellers of Germany thought and felt around 1520. Even here there was no unanimity. The sentiments of the peasants, of the nobles, of the priests were quite different. Class distinctions were clearly defined. Princes, knights, merchants, peasants were quite distinct orders, leading lives fundamentally different, having different habits, ideas, even morals. This is brought plainly home to

one merely by studying, side by side, the portraits that Holbein has left us of these wealthy merchants—these solid burghers with strong but civilized faces—and that other collection of portraits that introduce us to a whole extinct fauna of princes and princesses costumed with a barbarous and outlandish splendor, their faces sometimes grotesquely fat, sometimes of a pitiful thinness. Two Germanies. But here too are Sebald Beham's engravings of uncouth peasant dancers, cavorting savagely in a faunlike drunkenness. And finally—a thing that no one has painted —the scarred faces of the *Rittern*, the malign and blighted hawk-faces of the freebooting knights.

Contrasting Germanies; often mutually hostile Germanies. And yet by virtue of mass, of superior culture, and of moral standing, the burghers predominated. Without the least doubt they had the capacity to understand, support, and perhaps carry through to success a revolutionary effort. Only at what a cost! At a cost of what misunderstandings to start with and of what concessions later on the part of the hero who should undertake to lead! If he wasn't a burgher himself, heart and soul, if he chanced to be indifferent to worldly ends, a seer and dreamer, disdainful of men's vain strivings, mindful only of his vision and aspiring only to God? Would they follow him far? They knew what they wanted. They were not of the sort who, once started in one direction, would submit to be turned aside with docility. Between the man who should lead and them who should follow remorselessly without lapse of energy or attention there was destined to be a

fatal quarrel. Would this man behind whom the chaotic, disordered Germany of 1517 to 1520 was to range herself be the sort to be easily turned from his path? Would he follow theirs? That was the whole question.

## III

Absorbed as he had been in examining his conscience and attaining to peace of mind, occupied as he was, moreover, in 1516 with countless matters incidental to his position, Luther had had little time, up to 1517, to examine himself or study the manifestations of his own temperament. There was scarcely any occasion for taking his temperament into account until after, by dint of his great discovery, he emerged from the chrysalis of docile conformity as an Augustinian monk.

What theologians call Luther's system is not in fact an ideological structure, an assemblage of concepts external to the living, the sentient, the volitional man. That system for Luther was the very fountain of life, faith and hope. An impelling force. The truth about the Christian life, its spirit, methods and purposes.

The man who in 1517 nailed his theses to the door of the Wittenberg church knew that he had the truth. Or, more accurately, he felt that the truth was in him. Much remained to be done, of course, in the way of establishing the relations between ideas; many links in the chain of logic remained to be forged. Theologians can show us the stages through which, on the day he attacked indulgences,

he had yet to pass before he arrived at a rounded theory of repentance. That this task lay before him Luther knew and acknowledged. But he also knew, even though he did not say so definitely—he knew instinctively that in fundamentals he could not have erred. How could he have been mistaken? He taught what he believed. And what he believed was what God had revealed to him. In every line of the letter which he wrote on October 11, 1517, to Albert of Mainz this assumption is evident. The letter is that of a man with God on his side and within him.

Pride? The word is Denifle's. But allowance will have to be made for the Tyrolese controversial rigor of the subarchivist of the Vatican. For if this was pride then how many proud men there are that have figured in the history of religion! How many proud men there were among the most humble of mystics! One must make a distinction. Luther had no pride of intellect. He did not think with complacency of the force, the vigor, the inestimable power of his mind. Or if he did it was only by way of contemning it and in order to rid himself of all intellectual pride and to denounce it as a work of the devil, to pronounce upon it the special anathemas which, as early as 1517, he was keeping in store for Erasmus, in whom the spirit of the age found so perfect an incarnation.

Luther felt he was cleaving to God. He felt this so strongly, so utterly, and so warmly that when he addressed himself to his fellow men it was as though he spoke from the very heart of his God, of a God who directed him and to whose direction he submitted entirely. This en-

abled him, for a while at least, to resolve the contradiction implied in the following views: first, that his doctrine was uncompleted; and, second, that it was without question divinely inspired. A feat he achieved in his Commentary of 1516: "Those whom God leads are sensitive and receptive and are led miraculously by God's goodness to conclusions directly opposite to what they wish" . . . Bit by bit this doctrine was to harden into a formula. On March 5, 1522, in his famous letter to the Elector of Saxony, Luther was to proclaim: "Your Grace is aware or, if unaware, will permit me here to assure him: it is not from men that I receive the gospel but solely from Heaven through Our Lord Jesus Christ . . ." And he was to claim the right to dignify himself with the appellations servant of Christ and Evangelist. A natural culmination to a fatal development, the beginning of which we have previously noted; a text of 1530 will explain the logic of this conclusion. "Where is that heretic," exclaims Luther,[4] "who says, or would dare to say: 'Me, that is *my* doctrine'? They all have to say: 'It is not my doctrine I am preaching; it is the word of God.' " Quite true. No one understood that compulsion better than Luther when he wrote this.

What irresistible force may not such utter conviction engender in a man meagerly endowed with the critical spirit and seeing no need for it! But, viewed from the critical angle, what weakness also! A basic incapacity to

[4] Erl., XLVIII, p. 316.—For the two preceding quotations, cf. *Comment. in Romanos*, ed. Ficker, II, 177; De Wette, II, 138-139 and E., LIII, 104.

enter into anyone else's thoughts and feelings. An impatience at any objection. Rage and fury towards all opponents, enemies not merely of Luther, but of truth itself, since Luther was a witness here below to divine truth. Do they not see the truth? Are they blind? But even if they were blind, light at least might penetrate their closed eyelids. There are no two ways about it. They are blind from choice. They are wicked and damned. A hailstorm of abuse is poured out upon them from the depths of a sensitive heart imbued with the German variety of softness and sentiment. Brutal, violent abuse, unrestrained and stupid and, as the decorum of the monastic routine more and more relaxes, exceeding all bounds of decency. The vulgarity of a man of the people, the son of a miner, brought up in completely vulgar surroundings and earlier handicapped by a rather inferior strain of heredity. Perhaps also—at the start, anyway—some dash of the truculence peculiar to monkish mendicants of the day, who were skilled in personal attack and intemperate invective, directed especially against fashionable preachers of the day. But, not to labor the point, Luther ran to exaggerations.

* * *

What may not a man of this sort become capable of, a man, namely, who feels himself—and has reason to feel himself—void of any taint of selfishness and actuated solely by the love of his neighbor and of God, but who nevertheless encounters not merely normal opposition but

hate, double-dealing, and treachery (or what he interprets as such)? Especially if, on the other hand, he finds himself at the same time in perfect harmony with a following whom he dominates, but by whom, as they blow the hot breath of his own fevered passions back in his face, he is also dominated in his turn. Between the two packs, one of which he pursues with an energy that fairly revels in the release, the other spurring him on and exciting him to mad fury, he is carried out of himself. When he meets an obstruction he leaps over it with a superabundant vigor. There is something of the thoroughbred in him—this Luther—a sort of virgin and savage pride like that of a bounding animal who will not endure that another shall excede him, or pass him in the race, or run faster than he.

"For my part, the more they rage the more I run to extremes. I abandon my first positions only to make them yelp the more; I take up more advanced positions that they may bay at these also: *ego quo magis illi furunt, eo amplius procedo; relinquo priora, ut in illis latrent; sequer posterior, ut in illis latrent.*" This sentence from a letter of March, 1518, to a preacher at Zwickau [5] is typical. It deserves to be classed as one of the four or five documents which afford the most accurate impression of Luther's character and quality of mind. But how many more could be mentioned!

The same Luther writes to Staupitz one year later: "God drives me and pushes me forward instead of leading me. I am not my own master. I long for rest and here I am

[5] End., I, No. 69, *Luther a Sylvius Egrannus*, p. 173.

thrust into the midst of the mêlée." [6] Or again: "That rascal Eck is involving me in new controversies, so little is God disposed to permit me to sleep." Always this challenging attitude and this manner of charging furiously under compulsion which he describes in 1520 in the early pages of *De Captivitate*: "Whether or not I desire it, I am forced to become every day more learned, urged on and excited, as I am, to emulation by so many and such distinguished doctors!" And he enumerates those who, by attacking him, have forced him again and again to gain ground: Prierias, Eck, Emser, the true authors of his development. Also, speaking later of his marriage: "I did it," he exclaimed, "to defy the Devil and his host."

* * *

All of Luther is in these utterances, his passion, his uncalculating impulsiveness, his verbal unrestraint, his hyperbolic excesses: the qualities that made him write to Melanchthon, on August 1, 1521: "*Esto peccator et pecca fortiter*—Be a sinner and sin abundantly," or devise the amazing letter to Jerome Weller in 1530, an incomparable piece of psychological self-revelation, to which we shall later refer. How clearly all these exemplify Luther's trick of transmuting quite personal feelings into a theological system of general application by the interaction and continuous reciprocity between a very clearly defined temperament and a system of dogma, which proceeds from the temperament and in turn exalts it!

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[6] End., I, No. 154, p. 430-431.

*It was such a man* then—a man strong and effective not because he understood other people's ideas with a rare facility, but because, on the contrary, being occupied with his inner vision and having within him an ever ebullient fountain of religious emotion, he was perfectly able to suppose, on the strength of mere verbal analogies, that others were following his lead, whereas actually, by keeping a few steps ahead and offering well disguised bait, they were managing to draw him deeper and deeper into the woods—*it was such a man* who, by the act of nailing his theses to the church door at Wittenberg, stepped outside his little closed circle of monks and theologians. He took one step, a first but decisive step towards that Germany which we have described. And it was precisely to his weaknesses that he was to owe his formidable strength.

A fully self-conscious force directed by lucid intelligence would hardly have found a fulcrum in this divided anarchic Germany, in this Germany made up of twenty hostile Germanies where discordant voices demanded twenty contradictory remedies. A prudent sensible man, one who weighed his acts before committing them and who set his feet only on solid and adequately explored ground, would have done and said exactly what Erasmus did and said. But Luther was not a logician and sage but a pious man seeking to accomplish fine and great things and to lead a virtuous, devout and holy life. A man of instinct, he followed his impulse with no thought of difficulties or contradictions. These escaped his intelligence and were reconciled in the profound unity of a vital and

dominant sentiment. He was neither doctor nor theologian, but rather a prophet.

And because he was such, he was capable of bringing off that prodigious feat, his assumption, namely of the leadership of an anarchic Germany. He was able for an instant to give the distracted nation the illusion that it willed with a single will what, with all the passion of his being, he willed. He was destined for several months to blend a thousand dissonant voices into one magnificent choir with a single soul, and to flood the world with one song, his chorale.

But would it last long, this amazing harmony? No clear-sighted and attentive observer in 1517 could or should have expected that. And this was the whole secret of the winding up and unwinding of the drama in which were to figure a solitary hero and a united country.

# CHAPTER VI

## ERASMUS; HÜTTEN; ROME

SPEAKING, preaching, attacking, defending himself—such were Luther's concerns from 1517 to 1525. In all this transaction the theologian strives to discern a doctrine. The historian studies the man. A man at grips with his fellows, pulled and hauled about among friends and enemies, now resisting, now giving way, always battling and on the alert. Of course no art would suffice to compress the details of this full, dramatic and varied story within these pages. It is even impossible in so brief a space to deal with the principal episodes. We must stick to one or two problems.

### I

What was it that Luther was after at first, for example, in 1517? An ill-framed question. The Augustinian had in fact no definite plan. Events, rather than calculation or any considered purpose, spurred him on to further self-manifestations and revelations of his faith. And yet it is also true that he burned to communicate to mankind, to all men without regard to social or national distinctions, the sacred fire which devoured him; it is true that he strove

to communicate to them what he could—as much as he could—of that touching sentiment, that sincerity which precluded all calculation, that almost drunken impetuosity with which he surrendered his whole consciousness to the sense of God's holiness, the omnipotence of God's will, the boundlessness of God's compassion.

It was thus that he found himself occupied with the task of religious reform from *within* rather than from *without*. He certainly had no thought of remedying the external and formal abuses of a church; or rather that was merely a corollary; he regarded that as a secondary reform which would come of itself when the principal end was achieved. And this end was to change the hearts, the innermost inclinations, the relation to God of those of the faithful who had lacked guidance or had been misled by untrustworthy shepherds.

But a numerous group of men throughout Christian Europe had been dreaming for years of such a reform. Men of culture and decent feeling. We call them today the humanists and we formulate actively in their name what it pleases us to regard as their general program. That is taking a liberty, doubtless, and involves some simplification. But the fact remains that among scholars and learned men at that time was a widely prevalent inclination to clear away from the "primitive church" the parasitic growth of centuries, to eliminate from the almost infinite complications of dogma all that was not expressly contained in Holy Writ, to characterize as mere "human fabrications" all such extraneous matter, to free Christian

folk from the obligation to believe in it and thus leave them subject to God's law alone.

Nurtured on Greek and Latin and venerating the ancients, whose works a nascent philological science and the recent invention of printing combined to restore and popularize, these humanists sought, from their contact with masters of a system of thought independent of Christianity, something more than mere lessons in rhetoric or the gratification of a literary taste. Unlike the architects of the day, who went to antiquity only for decorative motifs to be plastered over the surfaces of essentially mediæval buildings, they assimilated ideas; they derived from the ancients a broadly humane inspiration; they found there the basic principles of a system of altruistic ethics independent of dogma. With this treasure they sought to enrich and adorn a Christianity which they envisioned as broadened and humanized and made flexible by the incomparable accession. One man, in the Europe of this period, especially embodied the viewpoint; French, English, Flemings, Germans, Poles, Spaniards united in honoring him; he was the author of a work in the Latin language, a work universal in spirit and both learned and practical. That man was Erasmus.

A tribune of the people? A leader of men? He was too finely constituted, too well balanced and reasonable to be able, except among people of culture where vast knowledge and subtle irony were properly estimated, to perform the function of an aggressive leader and to direct an attack. And besides, knowing men and the complicated chess

board of a gestating Europe, how could such a man contemplate anything like an immediate, brutal, violent assault from without, or believe in the success of such an adventure? He had traveled all over Europe. He had stayed successively in all its big capitals. He had held converse not alone with savants but with the real masters, the great ones, the political heads. Especially did he understand the Church of Rome, the effective hidden springs of its power, the nature of its diplomatic hold upon sovereigns, its infinite moral and material resources. He knew better than to underestimate its power. In order to alter in the manner he wished—which was not Luther's manner—the traditional bases of Christian life, in order to bring about the triumph of the *Philosophy of Christ*, that religion of the mind which he expounded and preached with a conviction that no one should question and an ardor that was not without peril, it was plain to Erasmus that he must remain within the bosom of the Church, must work from within continuously, without violence or uproar—and must never separate himself from it or permit himself to be expelled from it by a violent rupture, which indeed would have been as offensive to his feelings as it was to his mind.

* * *

Now when Luther's first writings appeared and his name flew from lip to lip throughout Europe, the scholarly people were the first to feel the excitement. The humanists were much agitated when the Augustinian opposed his

resounding ninety-five theses to the false doctrine of the preachers of indulgences; they fairly tore from each other's hands the protests and exhortations of Luther which Froben, who had done for Erasmus a similar service, had collected and published in an edition that was to be followed by a second in February and a third in August, 1519. With some naïveté they at once concluded that the monk was a second Erasmus, a sort of lieutenant.

Here, for instance, is Lambert Hollonius of Liège, a quite undistinguished person chosen at random. On December 5, 1518, in the heat of his excitement over a lecture of Luther's, he wrote to Erasmus with naïve enthusiasm.[1] How many others, decent people like him but easily imposed upon by appearances, were discovering that the Augustinian was prepared to accord them a certain freedom in the matter of observances: *mentem reddidit liberiorem, antea cærmoniarum observatiunculis frigidissimis servientem*, and without looking into his sentiments any further, were setting him down as one of the knights of the humanist army: *o nos beatos, quibus contigit hoc sæculo vivere, quo indice, duce ac perfectore te, et literæ et Christianismus verus renascuntur*? We cite this testimony merely because of the representative quality of the witness. But this man's diagnosis was deeply erroneous, although natural and almost inevitable.

For Hollonius and his contemporaries, it must be remembered, were ignorant of Luther's real feeling about

[1] *Opus Epistolarum Erasmi*, ed. Allen, III, ep. 904, pp. 445-446.

Erasmus, clear and well defined as it was from the start. They knew nothing about the letter which Spalatin, the chaplain of the Elector Frederick of Saxony and one of the ablest of Luther's protectors, wrote on Luther's behalf to Erasmus on December 11, 1516. In fact Spalatin did not even mention Luther's name. He referred to Luther as a "priest of the Augustinian order remarkable alike for the sanctity of his life and for his importance as a theologian." [2] But he proposed to Erasmus, on behalf of this unknown friend, a number of different questions all bearing the imprint of Luther's mind.[3] We are also in possession of a letter, unknown to Luther's contemporaries in 1518, which Luther wrote to Spalatin on October 19, 1516, a year before the posting of the theses, in which the "Augustinian priest," reverting to one of the grounds for his basic opposition to Erasmus, wrote this sentence, destined so often to reappear in more and more vehement form: "For my part, I disagree with Erasmus for the following reason: when it comes to Scriptural interpretation I prefer Augustine to Jerome exactly as much as he, Erasmus, prefers Jerome to Augustine." [4]

How striking and how prophetic! It calls up instantly all those later utterances displaying this very significant dual antipathy; one need merely note the two observations of 1533 which appear juxtaposed in Cordatus's compila-

[2] *Opus Epistol. Erasmi*, ed. Allen, II, ep. 501, p. 416.
[3] *Ibid.*, p. 417-418.
[4] End., I, No. 25, p. 63-64.

tion:[5] "I hate Erasmus from the depths of my heart," and "There is no writer whom I hate as I hate Jerome: *inter scriptores, nullum æque odi ut Hieronimum*!" Saint Jerome, the patron saint of the humanists, whose air of venerable learning and candor a hundred engravings of the period reveal to us as he sits in an almost audible silence at his study table encumbered with heavy tomes, a lion curled up in a peaceful doze at his feet, a cardinal's hat picturesquely outlined on the wall. But enough of these comments of 1533.

It was March 1, 1517, when Luther wrote to his friend Lang: "I read our Erasmus, but I find my fondness for him diminishing from day to day."[6] Going on to define his viewpoint the monk confessed having suspected the humanist of being "not ardent enough in his championship of Christ and divine grace." On Erasmus's theological doctrines he pronounces, disdainfully but with clear insight, this confident judgment: "In these matters Erasmus is much less informed than Lefèvre d'Etaples. What is human in him outweighs what is of God." But contemporary observers knew nothing about these clear and decisive utterances. They were not even in a position to entertain shrewd suspicions.

* * *

What grounds in fact had they for any suspicion? The man whom this obscure monk was attacking as early as

[5] *Tischreden*, W., III, p. 139; Ex animo odi Erasmum.— *Ibid.*, p. 140: *Inter scriptores nullum æque odi ut Hieronimum qui solum nomen habet Christi.*
[6] End., I. No. 34, p. 88.

1516 with such astonishing freedom and with so little regard for human distinctions and the recognized authorities (when his faith was the issue)—that man was the prodigy whose genius every writer and thinker in the whole universe extolled. It was the humanist who, at the age of fifty-one and in full possession of his intellectual resources, had just finished a six years task, by a truly superhuman effort, in only eight months and released successively for publication by Froben the six immense volumes of his *Saint Jerome* (April 1 to August 26, 1516); it was the glorious commentator who in February, 1516, had launched his *New Testament*, the Greek text with a translation in Latin from the original without reference to the Vulgate; it was the intellectual monarch whose happy audacities and unexampled virtues earthly monarchs, princes, nobles, prelates and savants in England, France, Germany, indeed every nation, extolled without stint: the man whose writings Capiton, from his pulpit at Basel, supplied with a commentary as though he were already one of the Fathers of the Church: the man to whom no less a person than Ulrich Zwingli, then an unknown pastor at Glarus, wrote a touching letter on April 27, 1516, couched in terms of the humblest gratitude and admiration, as the sequel to a visit which had been a species of pious pilgrimage.[7] How could any of Luther's contemporaries have imagined him the contemner of an intellec-

[7] *Opus Epistol. Erasmi*, ed. Allen, II, ep. 401, p. 225-226: *non alia re magis gloriantes quam Erasmum vidisse, virum de litteris scripturæque sacræ arcanis meritissimum.*

tual hero such as Erasmus? Or how could any have hesitated to add his name to the rolls of the vast army of humanists who worshipped the ancient philosophers?

Of course they were wrong. But posterity has largely shared in their error. Did not André Meyer, as late as 1907, in the earlier pages of a work otherwise distinguished for subtlety and penetration, declare that Luther's religious views "allied him to the great humanist"; that he also, as well as Erasmus, "was often reduced to tears by the decadence of the Church; that it hurt him to see the unfortunate German people oppressed and deceived by a grasping clergy"? The humble monk, Meyer went on to observe, "had arrived at the same conclusions as the great theologian of Rotterdam; it was needful to check the papal abuses and restore the faith to the pristine purity of evangelical ages." Hence this logical inference: "It was in the nature of things that Luther should early consider an alliance with Erasmus—in spite of some existing divergences between their ideas."

Line by line this was true by the standards of 1900; line by line it is false, or inaccurate, by those of 1927. But the end immediately sought in transcribing this passage is not to revert to the critical analysis to the development of which, in fact, this whole book is devoted; nor yet to produce in opposition to the view here expressed the categoric and uncompromising *Du bist nicht fromm* which was Luther's instinctive response to the writings of Erasmus. The singular usefulness of this twentieth century text is

that it helps us to grasp retrospectively a very important fact with regard to the sixteenth century: the origin and development of a misunderstanding or, more accurately, a cross purpose between Luther and the followers of Erasmus.

Without stopping to discern what was individual and new and revolutionary in a theological system which aspired to alter the whole conception of man's relations with God and hence the whole conception of piety, of the Christian life, and of practical morals, Erasmus's disciples seized on the most superficial analogies and the most thoroughly external resemblances as a proof of the relation between Luther's ideas and those of Erasmus. A return to the undefiled wellspring of faith, to its only wellspring, in short; the translation of the Gospel into the vernacular tongue and its general dissemination without regard to any pernicious distinction between the sacerdotal cast and the mass of believers; suppression of "abuses," the word being undefined and not limited by any reference to any causes or origins: might not any two men agree on a program so crudely stated? That there would be differences between man and man was possible, even probable. But were not Erasmus and his followers basically agreed about their reforming program? Surely no one in 1518 would have quarreled with the statement to which Meyer gave currency in 1907: it was in the nature of things that Luther should ally himself with Erasmus "in spite of some incidental divergences between their ideas."

Erasmus himself? In spite of his subtlety and his psychological penetration he did not at first see all the opposition that existed between him and Luther, representing as they did irreconcilable viewpoints. This is not surprising. He too, at this time, was much in the dark about Luther. Luther had every means of knowing and judging Erasmus: his whole output, so vast already and still in the process of growth. Erasmus knew nothing as yet about Luther, or almost nothing. This explains his supposing at first that he could use Luther, Luther's zeal, Luther's talent, for the success of his own cherished cause —to disseminate and promote his *Philosophy of Christ*.[8]

In 1504 he had first published a treatise intended to enlighten those who, "making religion consist in ceremonies and Judaic material observances, neglect the true piety." This was the *Enchiridion Militis Christiani*, a daring book which contained substantially Erasmus's whole program of reform.[9] This had not attained much success in 1504, but it had been republished. In 1515 it had found, notably in Germany, some enthusiastic readers. In the summer of 1518 Erasmus directed Froben to bring out still another edition for which he composed a long preface and a dedication to Paul Volz, an Alsatian abbe. It was a manifesto.[10] Quite unmistakably, although with

[8] Concerning Erasmus's policy with regard to Luther, at the beginning, see the notations of Renaudet, *Erasme, sa pensée religieuse*, p. 48 and especially p. 50 *sqq*.

[9] Commented upon by Renaudet, *Préréforme et Humanisme*, p. 429-435; Pineau, *Erasme, sa pensée religieuse*, ch. VI, p. 101 *sqq*.

[10] *Opus Epistol. Erasmi*, ed. Allen, t. III, ep. 858, p. 361 *sqq*.

his usual prudence, Erasmus was executing a very skilful manœuvre. He was extending to Luther the countenance of his authority and his reputation for moderation. He was careful not to name the mad Augustinian, but in a passage bursting with allusions he assumed the rôle of an advocate of free criticism, a right which he claims for himself and, manifestly, for Luther. "Also there is one who informs us: it is better to trust to good actions than to indulgences granted by the Pope. Does he mean to condemn absolutely these indulgences? No, merely that he prefers to them the means which the teachings of Christ indicate as more certain." A rather free rendering of Luther's opinions; but the strategy is apparent.[11] "This is one of my men," the humanist seems to say, pointing to the monk. "A hothead, no doubt; but listen: I am going to present his complaints and objections in my own way; when I speak for him you will see we are as one man: he is right. For the rest, his strictures are a prolog to a complete program of reform and rehabilitation. I presented this program to Christendom back in 1504. I present it again in 1518 in this revised and corrected edition of the *Enchiridion*." Able, clever and flexible tactics. It shows that as late as 1518 Erasmus had little conception of Luther.

But who could have pointed out to him his mistake? Only one man. Luther himself. By making public certain criticisms which he had confided to chosen friends only

[11] It caps the long letter to Volz (Allen, *loc. cit.*, p. 372): *non utique damnat illius condonationes, sed præfert id quod ex Christi doctrina certius est.*

in private letters. But so brutal a revelation, though not inharmonious with Luther's temperament, was for a hundred reasons impossible. It would have brought about a rupture and Luther could not afford to break with Erasmus. Alone, he might not have hesitated. But he wasn't alone any longer. Men surrounded him, friends, partisans, devoted to him but devoted also to Erasmus, incapable of anathematizing the one out of loyalty to the other. Men surrounded and pressed upon him and led him by easy stages to the point of making the needful gesture; this occurred on March 28, 1519, when he indited a letter to Erasmus, his first, which was full of an outward humility and submission, but at bottom was proud and violent,[12] an ultimatum: Are you for or against me?

But Erasmus was not free either. He was not free to say, even if he saw it, that Luther was not of his feather; not free to denounce the mistakes that Luther was guilty of, enormous as these appeared from his viewpoint. For already his enemies, acting on crude instinct, had established a bond between him and Luther. Was not Luther a follower, perhaps even a tool, of Erasmus? The humanist must have understood that from that time forth any condemnation of Luther would alight equally upon him and that it would be a mortal blow even to the cause of humanistic reform, his cause. At all cost it was necessary to prevent the despiteful monks from rejecting Luther as a heretic. At all cost it was necessary to protect Luther, inter-

[12] End., I, No. 167, p. 488; Allen, *Op. Epist. Erasmi*, III, ep. 933, p. 516.

cede for him with the princes, the prelates, the scholars; to create opinion and to fortify it. At all cost it was necessary to bring pressure to bear on Luther, to force him to act with prudence and not let himself be irreparably carried away. A prodigious task. Erasmus brought his power and his skill to bear on it.

Thus a sort of working compromise was established between these two men with their borrowed gospels—between Erasmus, nourished on pagan antiquity, an infinitely intelligent votary of a Philosophy of Christ that was packed with all human wisdom, and Luther, fortified in his turn by the Pauline and Augustinian tradition, uniquely and passionately Christian. Thus originated this prepossession on the part of people of learning, a prepossession so strong that it still survives: that Luther, namely, was the spiritual child and disciple of Erasmus, and that his mission was to realize in action the master's reforming tendencies.

Confusion. A basic confusion. There were soon to be others of a yet more serious nature.

## II

Two years in the history of Germany are particularly troubled, the years 1518 and 1519. The second of these opened with an event the consequences of which the whole previous year had been spent in foreseeing and shaping, the death, namely, of Maximilian.

When on January 12 the *"Weisskünig"* expired, candidates had been in the field already for months. Francis I

was buying electoral votes. But Maximilian had been steadily buying them back again on behalf of Charles. The Fuggers were behind the scenes financing the bidding. Meanwhile Henry VIII was computing his chances. And Luther's protector, the Elector Frederick, regarded with favor by the Pope who was hostile alike to the Valois and Hapsburgs, was awaiting his hour if ever it chanced to strike. The excitement was feverish and was further accentuated when the death of Maximilian brought the electoral college face to face with the actual problem. A certain elector was reported to have sold his vote six times, three times to Charles and three times to Francis.

But the game concerned others than princes. All Germany watched it closely with a mounting anxiety. Bold and expert pamphleteers, acting powerfully on a disturbed state of public opinion, raised a hue and cry now against the foreigner, now against the too powerful and too dictatorial French king, now against Rome and the papacy. Thus the xenophobia, of which the underlying motives have already been noted, was openly manifested.

Liberty, liberty! was the war cry of all these contenders. The battle cry also—to speak of only one—of that most eloquent of all these pre-journalistic journalists, a man whose program one would be at a loss to define but who wielded a striking influence on the masses, that strange Ulrich von Hütten whom Father Kalkoff, in his recent works,[13] seeks to tear from the niche he has held as a

[13] P. Kalkoff, *U. von Hütten und die Reformation* (1517-1523), Leipzig, 1920, 8°. Also, *Hüttens Vagantenzeit und Untergang*, Weimar, 1922, 8°.

German national hero and active promoter of the Lutheran Reformation and reduce to the rôle of a ruthless baron merely, regarding only the interest of the barons. But nobody questions his gifts, or his prodigious activity, or the amazing fecundity with which he poured his own energy and that of all who surrounded him into a press campaign of quite unwonted dimensions—the success, in a word, to which he so largely contributed.

At the decisive moment, when it came to the actual balloting, bargains and agreements and the barter of votes all went by the board. A vast wave of German national sentiment swept away all that rubbish. On June 28, 1519, Charles of Hapsburg was elected Emperor under pressure of a public opinion which, roused to its depths, united in a strange coalition the bourgeois, the nobles and the humanists, from Crotus Rubianus to Hütten and from Franz von Sickingen, king of the robber barons, to the rich Jacob Fugger of Augsburg, while 12,000 foot soldiers and 2,000 horses spontaneously arrayed themselves at the gates of Frankfurt prepared to offer resistance to the king of France.

* * *

On June 28, 1519, Brother Martin Luther, his new and enthusiastic friend Melanchthon, his disciple Karlstadt, and the rector of Wittenberg made a solemn entry into Leipzig in carriages, with an armed escort of two hundred students from Wittenberg led by the young Duke

George, to do battle in the great hall of the Pleissenburg Palace with John Eck, the theologian from Ingolstadt, a doughty supporter of the Roman orthodoxy.

A perfectly ordinary mediæval disputation in which learned men were invited to hurl at each other, in the presence of a notary, weighty syllogisms, impromptu citations, and Bible texts winged with an energy proper to a popular preacher. No doubt. But the crowded benches at Leipzig represented a whole eagerly attentive Germany, a Germany that was still agitated by the imperial election. A Germany which was more and more clearly discerning in Luther a combative and destructive power.

On April 3, 1518, Hütten wrote to a friend jestingly:[14] "Maybe you have not yet heard. A faction at Wittenberg in Saxony has risen in insurrection against the Sovereign Pontiff; another is assuming the defense of the papal indulgences. Both parties are led into battle by monks; these redoubtable generals, hot, hasty and gallant, howl, clamor, shed tears, rail at fortune; they have now even set about writing and frequenting libraries; propositions, corollaries, homicidal invectives are sold. I only hope they will put each other to death. For since they are enemies I wish they may fall into utter confusion and crush one another as relentlessly as may be!"

April 3, 1518 . . . But on October 26, 1519, Hütten no

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[14] *U. von Hütten Schriften*, ed. Böcking, Leipzig, 1859, t. I, ep. 75, *ad Hermannum de Neuvenar*, p. 167.

longer jests. He contemplates the possibility of confiding his plans to Luther.[15] What plans? It is hard to say definitely. But one thing is certain, they are oriented against Rome—Rome, the grand old standing enemy of Hütten and Hütten's friends. There was first the humanist hatred of the mercantile and rapacious Rome of the Pontiffs in contrast with the once glorious pagan Rome; the idea belongs to Hütten's friend Crotus Rubianus, the same who urged him as a young man to flee to the Abbey of Fulda, and who later introduced him into humanistic circles and who collaborated with him, from 1515 to 1517, in the compilation of the *Letters of Obscure Men*: "At Rome," he was destined to write to Luther himself,[16] "I saw two things, the monuments of antiquity and the seat of the pestilence. The first sight, how lovely! The second, how shameful!" Then there was too the envious hatred of the robber knight, who, true to the sentiment of the men of his class, such as Franz von Sickingen, the master and symbol of robber knighthood, cast covetous glances towards the properties of the Church, hated monks and priests, talked of cropping their ears, and fomented trouble everywhere for the sake of what might come out of it. And finally there was an especially German hatred of all those insatiable Italians such as Crotus Rubianus describes, the cardinals, protonotaries, bishops, legates, ecclesiastical law-

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[15] *Ibid.*, I. 313, *Huttenus Eobano Hesso: Lutherus in communionem huius rei accipere non audeo, propter Albertum principem.*

[16] End., II, No. 234, p. 207, Oct. 16, 1519.

yers, like so many hungry birds of prey swooping down on a rotting carcase.[17]

Away with all these despoilers, the Florentine Pope with his hooked banker's fingers, his henchmen, his legates, his nuncios! Germany wills to be free and to manage her own affairs. Enough of these extortionate threats that a Julius de Medici is again to reiterate in his instructions to the legate, Aleander,[18] as:—Germany must look sharp! The Holy See heretofore has given her the Empire. She shall still enjoy it only if the Germans persist in their devotion and fidelity to the Holy See. Otherwise—! . . . But it may be a shock to this same Aleander to hear Chièvres speak to him affectedly, not of *the* Pope, but of "*his* Pope" —his, the Italian legate's![19] All of which explains the letters Crotus Rubianus wrote Luther and the hatred and scorn they express for the Pontiff of the fivefold tiara, a stage king who in the great festivals advances with pomp and luxury and display of wealth: but shabbily at the tail end of the procession in a rear guard of harlots and ruffians comes the Eucharist on an ass[20] . . .

All of this is slyly imparted to Luther, adroitly, per-

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[17] End., II, No. 234, p. 207; *Quando progreditur Rex sacrificulus, tot Cardinales, tot Protonotarii, tot Episcopi . . . circa ipsum glomerantur, quot famelicæ aves ad putrida cadavera . . . Sequitur Eucharistia in quodam asino, in extrema cohorte, quam impudicæ mulieres ac prostituti pueri constituant.*

[18] Balan, *Monumenta Reformationis Lutheranae* 1884, 8°, doc. no. 63, Aug. 15, 1521, p. 166; *Ma è possibile che . . . la sede Apostolica possi revocare il beneficio quale gli ha dato et conferito in altri . . .*

[19] Balan, *op. cit.*, doc 54, p. 132: *Non potei pero fare di non responder audacemente quanto aquello parola:* Vostro Papa *che se erano christianir il Papa era cosi ben suo come nostro.*

[20] Text cited above, page 144 note 3.

sistently. It is breathed to him with every variety of emphasis. How well they know him! With what diabolical cleverness Crotus Rubianus insinuates one of the things best calculated to make this mad controversialist forget himself: He has been condemned in advance, whatever he does or says. A fine spectacle he makes with his arguments. Why, even if he had at his beck a whole army of Saint Pauls, Rome would not turn a hair. No, to conquer he needs something more than arguments—men, Germany! Already the eyes of Germany are turned upon him; she awaits; let him heed. "For my part I often refer to you as the Father of your country. And indeed you are worthy to have a gilded statue of you erected and a holiday set apart for you, you who were the first to dare to become the avenger of a people steeped in criminal errors!"

Letters flying between Hütten and Melanchthon and Luther in these fatal months, or from Crotus Rubianus to Hütten and thence to Luther, from the Baron Silvester von Schaumburg to Luther—have we always sufficiently studied their content and bearing?

* * *

Luther shared all the qualities of his race and land. He was functionally a German, in his ways of thinking and feeling and acting. This is commonly said. Perhaps even too commonly. It should still be remembered that in his monastic days his mind was concerned with Christians rather than Germans. And when, having arrived at certainty, he undertook to communicate his secret, he

addressed himself to all men, not merely to his brothers by race or language.

The humanists, who were first to respond to his utterances, were aware of this fact. Their horizon extended beyond all political boundaries. For was not their master a man who eluded national classifications? The people of Rotterdam took pride in his having been born in their city. But wherein did this genuinely universal genius belong to them more than to the people of Basel or of Paris or of Anvers? Erasmus was a citizen of enlightened Christendom, for its benefit only he labored, thought, published his huge editions and learned treatises. And his dream was not to reform some local church restricted by the narrow boundaries of any one country but to broaden and renovate all Christianity. A dream of such scope that, feeling himself cramped even in the immense grazing land afforded by the Apostles and Fathers and Doctors of the Church, Erasmus, in the hope of expanding his religion to suit the appetites of his contemporaries, flung wide to them in addition the magnificent treasure house of ancient philosophy.

How it must have rejoiced not his vanity but his sense for and love of unity when he received from all sides, from all countries together, Teutonic and Latin, Anglo-Saxon and Slavic, from Poland and Spain, from England and France, and from Germany and Italy, testimonials not merely of personal admiration but of agreement in his ideas and, even more, those triumphant bulletins, which so often appear in his correspondence, of victories gained

for the Renaissance and the new spirit! At a time when on all sides all sorts of nationalistic enthusiasms were developing actively and when the supra-national agencies of the Middle Ages were falling into decay, so that a keen observer would have had to acknowledge that, assuming a connection existed between events in the realms of religion and of politics, the spirit of nationalism was beginning to act in the domain of faith as a menace to Christian unity, was there not, on the other hand a magnificent dawn of hope? Was it not at least possible that the Renaissance, by creating and diffusing a new type of mind imbued with reason and informed with the culture of the ancients, would bring to fruition that spiritual and moral unification of the civilized world which men had conceived as their ideal in the thirteenth century—and which the humanists of the sixteenth century would be able to realize more broadly, more liberally, and with deeper wisdom?

Instinctively these humanists,—at least all those whose energy, faith and candid and enthusiastic activity was such as to encourage Erasmus and sustain him in such a vision,—when they mustered Luther into the fraternal and glorious army that, from one end to the other of Christendom, ranged itself behind Erasmus's standard, conceived they were lifting him also out of his local setting, his tiny fatherland, and into the broad sunlight which burned equally all through the world for all the disciples of Christ the Redeemer. They showed him the road, the same road they themselves had to traverse, each accord-

ing to his strength, in the train of their common leader. A rough road and a hard road to follow even though it was the royal road of Christianity. Camped right in the middle Rome surveyed it jealously. But it led to a universal reformation—*the* reformation, not of this or that province of the Church, but, in the full meaning of the word, of Christianity.

As for Ulrich von Hütten, however, and Crotus Rubianus and countless others behind these persuasive file-leaders—it was not this road that they recommended to Luther but a quite different one. What interested them was not the Christian religion or Christian civilization, but rather the German church—the relations of Germany with the Papacy, the political and economic relations as much as, if not more than, the religious . . . *Ego te, Martine, saepe Patrem Patriae soleo appelare.* A splendid formula! What seduction, what magic it holds! But actually, when Hütten and his ilk greeted with these words the insurgent Wittenberg monk, half-defeated as he had been in the Leipzig encounter and charged by Eck with being a Hussite to the great delight of the Hussites themselves—when they put forth their strength to deflect him into the narrower and apparently easier path of nationalism, what a limit they sought to impose on the scope of his plans. They confronted Luther with a tremendous temptation. "Be a German. Think of Germany. Realize your work here, among us, on the spot. You seek followers. Open your eyes; look at all these waiting burghers, all these peasants full of inarticulate rebellion, all these nobles

offering their help. Why look further? You have only to will it. You have only to make a gesture. The task will accomplish itself."

But Hütten found an unexpected ally in his dealings with Luther: the Holy See. For whether or not an internal reformation of Christianity was possible under conditions existing then in Europe and in the Church, one thing at least was apparent, it could only be brought about by a man who remained in the Church and worked from within with prudence. This was clear to Erasmus. To Luther, less clear. And Rome, without waiting, pitched him out as a heretic.

## III

Was this the result of a cunningly developed and Machiavellian plan? It is scarcely safe to affirm it. The swift and alarming tidings from Wittenberg and Mainz made, of course, an immediate stir at the court of Leo X. But enmities, rancor and jealousy played an important rôle in the tragedy. To have allowed those about him to display from the very first a preconceived wish and an *a priori* intention to exclude Luther from the faith was surely a grave responsibility for the Medici Pope to have taken at the opening of the schism. There was, for example, that vain pedant Mazzolini (Prierias). And that pseudo-diplomatic June bug, Miltitz. Mazzolini displayed from the very beginning the Roman bias, and Miltitz made the whole conflict look like a piece of political jobbery, which

was highly offensive to Luther. Even that excellent and irreproachable Christian, Thomas de Vio, cardinal of Gaëta (Caïetanus) was not a fortunate choice. A Dominican and a Thomist, he could not understand Luther's language. But other things must be thought of. If these men were so prompt to cry heresy, and to look for corroboration, and to accept the least trustworthy evidence, this was merely because the diplomats and statesmen who directed church policy had become incapable of recognizing and making allowances for the efforts, however crude, of a passionate believer to tap the wellsprings of religious life within his own soul.

What concerned them more than everything else in the teaching and preaching of Luther were the practical "fruits" it seemed likely to bear; their despatches were full of that word; they saw a political danger, in short, which was palpable to them through the activity of men like Hütten. In view of the delicate state of affairs in Germany, Luther was a destructive portent. Was he to be left to upset everything? But what had they in mind? The groundwork of a traditional piety? A system of dogma? Not at all. They were anxious about the positions the Holy See held in Germany. Political advantages! Best to crush this crude fellow without loss of a second: time enough for discussion later. And that was why Ghinucci and Prierias, the appointed judges, summoned Luther to Rome in July, 1518. That was how the Pope came to impel the heresiarch in precisely the direction that Hütten was trying

to draw him. That was how the Church was once more put in the position of having to pay the cost (but it cost more than mere money this time) of that great Italo-European policy of an Alexander VI, a Jules II, and a Leo X. As to Maximilian putting his shoulder to the wheel, that also was politics. He had to serve the Curia in order that it in return might accept Charles's claim as a candidate for Emperor. The Pope's brief of August 23 had a chilly violence.

Caïetan was to summon the monk before him in Germany. There would be no discussion. He would order a recantation. If Luther obeyed, grace would be extended to him. If he was obdurate, he would be arrested and taken to Rome. If he fled he would be excommunicated, and the princes would have to turn him over to the Pope. After seeing Frederick, Caïetan endeavored to atone for past blunders. Early in October he had a fruitless interview with Luther, who was furnished with a safe conduct. It was fruitless, that is, except that it led Martin Luther to have posted on the door of the Cathedral of Augsburg his appeal to the now better informed Pope. It furnished him also an opportunity to say: "I am he whom they strike but do not refute."

Certainly it is easy after the event to exclaim: "What foresight! Rome well knew what malice lurked behind the theology of the ninety-five articles." But was Luther at that time deliberately seeking a rupture? Had he already consented to the schism in advance? Was he the man to

act lightly? It is easy to smile and answer: "O yes, Luther would have submitted—on condition that Rome became Lutheran." But is that the whole truth? Confronted with heresy the Church has not always retorted with violence. It has often instead played the fire game, consuming first, but reserving the right to eliminate subsequently, when the digestive process was finished. When Luther said, "Prove that I am wrong," was it wise to reply categorically, "Obey or perish"?

* * *

Are illustrations in order? When Caïetan encountered Luther at Augsburg, he condemned especially his interpretation of the doctrine of the "treasures of the Church, whence the Pope derives his indulgences." These treasures, Luther had written, are not sufficiently defined or well enough known to Christian people. In biting phrases he indicated that it was not a question of a material patrimony; the preachers of indulgences took good care not to scatter that sort of wealth abroad; they were keeping it for themselves! But he argued that the treasures of the Church do not consist in the merits of Christ and the Saints. This whole question, resting as it did on his profound and intimate conception of what he then called the theology of the cross—this whole business which concerned the monk so intimately—Caïetan absolutely refused to discuss. The question had been settled once and for all by the papal bull of Clement VI. But, protested Luther, even according to that I am right. Caïetan replied shortly:

"Do you believe or not? *Credis, vel non credis*?" Those who incline to approve the simplicity of this procedure should pause and consider the inference: in 1518 one could not even discuss the question without being excluded from the communion of the faithful.

It is true that Caïetan attacked Luther on another ground also, his doctrine of justification: *Neminem justificari posse nisi per fidem*. A fundamental question, no doubt. But when all is said, was Luther's doctrine, as formulated in the summer of 1518 before the Leipzig disputation, indubitably heretical? It is not the function of an historian to reply to this question. He can and must recollect one fact only.

Attention has been drawn in recent years to a group of theologians, certain of whom attained high positions in the church, who made somewhat tardy doctrinal professions on the subject of justification (at the council of Trent), in which they expressed opinions very closely approximating, at least from the viewpoint of an outsider, the opinions of Luther. For instance, Girolamo Seripando, general of the Augustinians from 1539 to 1551, who received the cardinal's hat (1561) and fulfilled up to the time of his death (1563) the functions of Cardinal Legate to the Council. There to the indignation of some (not Augustinians!) he expounded and defended with energy ideas boldly antipathetic to Thomists and approximating the Lutheran ideas. Did he get them from Luther? Canon Paquier in the *Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique,* makes haste to purge Seripando of any such suspicion, but

that is of small importance. The fact remains. A Papal legate, a Roman cardinal, was able with impunity forty years after the condemnation of Luther by the Bull *Exsurge*, and seventeen after the death of the heretic, to sustain in full council doctrines of such a nature that M. Paquier finds himself impelled to write: "The very different manner in which the Church has treated these ideas and these men (Seripando, Luther) [21] is no occasion for scandal . . . in all periods throughout the history of the Church certain closely related theories have been accorded just such different treatment. The real reason for this difference . . . is in the doctrine itself . . . Seripando and men of his temper have always insisted upon man's responsibility toward God and the moral obligation resting upon him. Luther, on the other hand, obstinately denied free will and left a vast bulk of writing of which the gist was that faith compensates for the most unequivocal sins." But what period does this writing belong to? Were these affirmations, whose "vast bulk" is alluded to, anterior to the Leipzig disputation? Let us recall the date and the fact that Luther, when he appeared before Caïetan at Augsburg, on October 12-14, 1518, almost a year before his encounter with Eck, had already without more ado been declared heretical by his Roman judges; already the order had been transmitted to the heads of the German Augustinians to have their pestilent brother incarcerated; already the Papal brief of August 23, 1518, was rallying Church and state to oppose him.

[21] Article on *Luther*, fasc. 74 (t. IX), 1926, col 1199-1202.

Let us have a look now at a German document, *Unterricht auf etliche Artikel*, which Luther published in February, 1519, on the eve of the Leipzig disputation.[22] A work of reforming tendency, doubtless. A bold effort to purify the theology of his time. But all that he says about the cult of the saints, on whose mediation men were forced to depend even when God himself was the object of worship and supplication (page 70), or about the idea that souls in purgatory may be succored by prayers and alms-giving although we are ignorant even of the very nature of their punishment and the manner in which God applies our intended aid (*weiss ich nit, und sag noch das niemand genugsam weiss*)—all he says about these traditions of the Church is that they are in the relation to the Decalog what straw is to gold, *wie das Gold und edel Gesteyn uber das Holtz und Stroo*. As for what he says about leaving the Roman Church, to which men are bound by Saint Peter, Saint Paul, and by the precious blood of an hundred martyrs, or about the supremacy of the Pope, whom men should honor, like all the established authorities, since all are ordained of God, there is nothing about these matters which has not been maintained with as much or with even more temper by twenty, nay forty, contemporary theologians or humanists without any such consequence as their being hunted down, summoned to Rome, defamed as heretics and denounced in advance of a hearing to the secular powers.

[22] W., II, 66. The text is short (p. 69-73) and divided into paragraphs.

Picture Luther, the Luther that we have described, not a man who professed his ideas magisterially with the air of a theologian but a man whose faith was his life, his dream, his own private magic—picture his dilemma. Yes or no? *Credis vel non credis?* What inner revulsions! Yes or no, when it was a question for him of what was more precious than life, that certainty, namely, and that deep conviction which he had wrought for himself at the price of what deadly birth pangs! And by what means? By meditating unceasingly on the Word of God . . .

And then when he looked about him—What, was he a heretic, one of those who are cast without hesitancy into prison, who are dragged in handcuffs before a judge to hear a preconceived sentence passed upon them? But was not the Elector Frederick of Saxony a fervent Catholic and a pious man? Had he not been almost too ardent on the subject of indulgences and of holy relics, he whose whole ambition had long been to obtain from the Pope the Order of the Golden Rose? Anyway he supported Luther. He refused to hand him over to Caïetan. He regarded him as a good Christian, incapable of ill.

And as for those doctors, Augustinians, of course, but also Dominicans, and Thomists whom Luther had encountered toward the end of April, 1518, in a disputation at Heidelberg, they had been content with merely holding their ground and declining to follow Luther in his deductions. At least they had not avoided him like the plague. And did the University of Wittenberg cast him

out? Had Staupitz, his master, his kind and fatherly adviser, chosen to break with his protegé or to deliver any rebuke to him? No, he had chosen rather to stand at his side before Caïetan and refuse to imprison him. As for those passionate young Christians that Luther had drawn to him, Bucer from Heidelberg, Melanchthon, fired by the ardent monk's utterances—were all these heretics, disciples of heresy, men misled by a dangerous criminal?

No, Erasmus was right for once. The reason that Rome pursued Luther with such vindictiveness was that what he said was a blow at "the crown of the Pope and the bellies of monks." And Hütten also was right. It was also true that Luther was a German who had posted himself menacingly at the door of Germany on the pretext of guarding her against costly exploitation at the hands of Italians. How was such an impressionable, impulsive fellow as Luther to close his eyes and condone such apparent abuses?

Thus Rome did all that it could to throw Luther into the arms of Hütten and Crotus Rubianus. By classing him once and for all, and almost without argument, as one of those criminal heretics whose ideas must be crushed in the germ, Rome expelled him by degrees from the bosom of that one Catholic Church in which it had been his quite evident and sincere wish to live and die. Rome accepted and even anticipated the schism. It closed the door to pacification in Luther's face, thus precluding the possibility of any discreet reform from within.

We shall not go into the question whether Luther would have accepted this possibility if it had been offered or what he would have made of it if he had accepted it. We merely observe that, even if he had chosen to, Rome in any case was determined to make a disturbance and produce a rupture rather than allow him to preach a "theology of the Cross" as opposed to that "theology of sufficiency," his distaste for which no invective was adequate to express. Let us not underestimate the real power and prodigious vitality of the Church, its thoroughly demonstrated knack of replenishing its flesh, blood and bones on a diet that was often unappetizing. Let us not be misled by those who cry: "Nonsense. The monk was a heretic!" Paradoxically, in this instance, just such zealots as these seem to lack proper confidence in the Church. Only yesterday a scholar published two large volumes which show how a Pope, in order to recapture Germany, once conceded her the right to the two sorts of communion (the wine as well as the bread) but how very shortly afterwards the successors of this same Pope contrived to destroy all the consequences of this concession. It is well to remember this saying: the Church has never been squeamish.

Fate is often ironic. It was the Roman Church, dedicated above all others to the preservation and maintenance of fraternal solidarity in a common hope among all believers as against ethnic particularisms and nationalistic divisions—it was precisely the "Catholic" Church which applied itself now with an ill-timed precipitancy to advancing the hour when—through the emergence of a

species of Lutheranism which, as has been remarked, subordinates the universality of a saving message to the program of an autonomous national institution—this historic development was inevitable: there were destined to be reforms but *the* reformation had become an impossibility.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE IDEALIST OF 1520

ONE serious question confronts the student of influences. In a given case how far was the man whose actions and reactions are under consideration influenced by the play of those weighty forces which the historian sees as surrounding him?

Some men submit to pressure so readily and completely that they seem to efface themselves or at least to dissolve into other forms. Other men remain sealed, impenetrable, inaccessible: everything slides off from them, nothing takes a hold. Luther, in his vital complexity, gave himself to no one, borrowed from all, and found his identity again in an enriched consciousness.

#### I

That he lent himself generously is not in the least surprising. It was not merely necessary for him to do so in order to act at all, since the world is not peopled with pure spirits or disembodied consciousnesses; it was even agreeable, in certain respects, to his sanguine, violent nature, his temperament as a child of the people, his habits of

strained activity, that he should make overtures himself and display his virgin energy as an inestimable attraction to his eager followers.

Impatient of contradiction and careless of scandal, a born controversialist, he preferred to advance by leaps. When one had caught up with him he was off again with a sudden bound, far ahead, no doubt laughing over his shoulder at his short-breathed and sheepish pursuers. Did they overtake him again? A long spring this time, so violent that his audacity left him quite alone, almost stupefied, frightened by his own achievement, but exultant. Even when he is undisturbed and no one pursues him, he proceeds by a series of jumps, as sudden and unexpected as possible. His achievements are stupefying. They startle even his compatriots, startle them perhaps even more than us. But this discovery only half reassures one.

We will take but one instance, his advice, *Pecca fortiter*, to which we referred above.[1] When he wrote these words, since become so famous, he was calm. He was not embroiled with anyone. He was writing a letter to his friend Melanchthon. His theme was the sovereign potency of divine grace. And now hear him expound: "If you preach it, do not preach an imagined grace but a real grace. If

[1] End., III, 208: Luther to Melanchthon, from Wartburg, Aug. 1, 1521. Because of its importance we quote the text in full: "*Si gratiae prædicator es, gratiam non fictam sed veram prædica; si vera gratia est, verum non fictum peccatum ferto. Deus non facit salvos ficte peccatores. Esto peccator et pecca fortiter, sed fortius fide et gaude in Christo qui victor est peccati, mortis et mundi . . . Dei agnum qui tollit peccatum mundi.*" And then, this other celebrated phrase: "*Ab hoc, non avellet nos peccatum, etiamsi millies uno die fornicemur aut occidamus*" . . . Then the conclusion, with its antithetical balance: "*Ora fortiter; es enim fortissimus peccator.*"

grace is real, it can cleanse us of actual sins: God does not save imaginary sinners. Therefore be a sinner, and sin for all you are worth! But even more heartily rest your faith and your joyful hope in Christ, who triumphs over sin and death!"

One feels the acceleration. One sees the man advance, step by step, full of his idea; then suddenly he warms to the leap: "Come, accept. Be a sinner! *Esto peccator*! And don't do the thing by halves; sin squarely and with gusto, *pecca fortiter*! Not just playful sins. No, but real, substantial, tremendous sins!" A famous passage. And I can fairly hear the apologists. I understand without its being explained to me that this letter, addressed as it was from Wartburg to the good pious Melanchthon was not intended to incite that slight and delicate Hellenist to wallow in drunkenness and vice. I am capable also of conceiving that Luther's own life did not consist largely in such frivolous pleasures. The important thing is to note this extravagant manner of reasoning, which a hundred times shocks and bewilders and offends common sense and the spirit of moderation which Spengler would tell us, with scorn, is un-Faustian. Perhaps. Anyway what a chance such an impulsive excitable thinker affords, plunging blindly forward into a boundless ocean with no guarantees of security, for artful hands to manoeuvre him, incite him, direct him!

The more so since he is a monk who for years has been living in a monastery without any real contact with men. What can such a one know of the world, or of politics,

or of the precarious business of earning a living? The men whose society he is beginning to frequent are reasoning beings, but he thinks of them rather as factitious compounds of virtues and vices of whose behavior and probable reactions he knows nothing. How then would he be able to take into account all the difficulties, limitations and renunciations that existence imposes, all the disappointments and rebuffs it inflicts on enthusiasts who, sunk in a revery, march straight ahead without taking account of the dangers along the way?

* * *

After some weeks of relative calm it chanced at the beginning of 1520 that Luther's peace was again disturbed by crowding events. On January 18, his most dangerous enemy, John Eck, left for Rome with the avowed intention of making it his special business to obtain a denunciation from the Curia. After serving on a commission of four men—including himself and Caïetan—Eck had the satisfaction of seeing a recommendation prepared in accordance with his views. On June 15, at a hunting party at Magliana, the Bull *Exsurge Domine* was signed by Leo X. The irreparable step had been taken.

The Bull however did not excommunicate Luther. It condemned his opinions and ordered his writings to be burned but it allowed him sixty days in which to make his submission. It was known, however, that he would not submit. And by the middle of July two commissioners, Eck and Aleander had been delegated to see to the pub-

lication of the Bull in the dioceses of Brandenburg, Meissen and Magdeburg. Eck fulfilled his mission on September 21, 25 and 29. Aleander, towards the end of the same month, talked with Charles-Quint at Anvers, made sure of his intentions, and on October 8 presided at a solemn auto-da-fé at Louvain of the heretic's books and writings.

Thus, from January to June and from June to October, 1520, the net was closing on Luther. At Leipzig, early in July, 1519, Eck was beginning to inject into the quarrel the disturbing names of Wycliffe and Huss. Emser went no further than that in his letter to John Zach: he disingenuously undertook to defend Luther against the charge of Hussitism. Once the Bull was published there was no further temporizing. Luther was no longer a heretic merely by analogy. He was a heretic in and of himself. Thus Eck had willed and thus Rome had declared. A heretic. What next?

Of course the Elector Frederick of Saxony was friendly to him. But how little to be depended on is the favor of princes! If the Emperor should take a hand personally in the quarrel and exert all his power to have the Bull executed, how would Luther fare then? Or rather, since Luther had no fear for himself, how would Luther's cause fare? What he needed was supporters. And the need was supplied. Erasmus was active in his behalf. Hütten also. Luther closed his eyes to the chasm which separated him from the scholar and the knight and accepted the aid which they offered.

Erasmus, ordinarily so cautious, was that very moment

incurring the danger of compromising himself in a struggle "to *obtain* from the Holy See, and if needful, with all due submission, *exact*, a suspension of the sentence and the adoption of another policy with regard to Luther." He was writing to Leo X and to others adroit but also courageous letters. For Luther's sake? Probably. But above all for the sake of his own desired Christian reformation.[2]

Hütten did no less. He assured Luther of the ultimate support of Franz von Sickingen. Then, not without some preliminary embarrassment at finding himself in direct contact with so pious a Christian, he burned his bridges and wrote to the monk a first letter, dated June 4, 1520.[3] It was spread at once throughout Germany, a letter that opened with: "Liberty forever! *Vive Libertas*!" The Bull *Exsurge* could come now. Luther knew that even if Frederick abandoned him he would not be surrendered now without a struggle. Precious certainty, it gave him not the courage to face the world, for he had that already, but—the hope that his cry would be heard.

This meant much. And yet it was not all that Hütten did for Martin Luther. The formidable controversialist was at this time conducting a furious campaign against Rome. In April 1520 the famous *Vadiscus seu Trias Romana* was published along with other dialogues by Scheffer at Mainz: soon after came violent writings on the schism and attacks on Rome, interspersed with the slogan, "The

[2] Renaudet, *Erasme, sa pensée religieuse*, p. 88 *sqq.*

[3] Böcking, *Hüttens Schriften*, I, *Epistolæ*, p. 355; End., II, No. 310, p. 408; for the different translations and editions of this letter, Böcking, *op. cit.*, I, IV (Index).

die is cast, *Jacta est alea*!" [4] Once the Bull had been published Hütten seized upon it. He printed it with biting footnotes, a complete anti-papal commentary; he sowed it broadcast throughout Germany.[5] "It is not just a question of Luther; we are all concerned. The Pope has drawn his sword not against a single man; he is threatening us all. Mark my words and remember that you are Germans!" All this was in Latin. But at this point he decided to widen his public. And so German got mixed with the Latin in his menacing volley of pamphlets.[6]

With these Luther was familiar. He read them. He borrowed words from them, slogans, the expression *alea jacta est*, which he uses in a letter of July 10 to Spalatin notifying him conclusively of his decision to break with Rome: *Nolo eis reconciliari. Alea jacta est.*[7] Thence likewise he derived a passion for liberty, to which, in his fine and pure treatise on Christian liberty, he was destined to give a new meaning. Last of all he derived arguments therefrom. Quite ingenuously in a letter of February 24, 1520, he informed Spalatin of the feelings of indignation he had experienced on reading, in Hütten's new edition,

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[4] Cf. Böcking's *Bibliographie*, t. I, the beginning: the works of Hütten are listed there in chronological order.

[5] *Bulla Decimi Leonis contra errores Martini Lutheri et sequacium*; Böcking *loc. cit.*

[6] *Ein Klag über den Luterischen Brandt zu Mentz*, 4 fo. in-4°; *Clag und Vormanung gegen dem Gewalt des Bapsts*, 26 fos. in-4°; *Anzeig wie allwegen sich die Romischen Bischoff oder Bapst gegen den teutschen Kayseren gehalten haben*, 8 fos. in-4°; etc. Cf. Böcking, *loc. cit.*

[7] End., II, No. 323, p. 432: *A me quidem, jacta mihi alea, contemplus est Romanus furor et favor.*

Valla's work on the Donation of Constantine.[8] He was letting himself drift; he was slipping bit by bit; the arguments, the themes, the invective of the anti-papal German nationalists were becoming familiar to him. Already this influence might be traced in certain pages of his vigorous pamphlet against the Papacy which he wrote in May and published in June, 1520, his first appeal to the princes against the scarlet woman of Babylon: *Du rote Hur von Babilionien*! It appeared more definitely in his reply to a libel of Prierias; here one finds a notable invitation extended to Christians to wash their hands in the blood of the folk of the Curia. But the *Manifesto to the Christian Nobility of the German Nation* is completely infused and irradiated with this spirit; it trumpets a rally to all Germans against the public enemy.

* * *

The *Manifesto*, that *Vadiscus* of Luther's, so plainly inspired by Hütten's—what a curious document for the historian when, steeling himself against its persuasion and the potent spell of the life and passion that inhere in its stormy pages, he sets himself to analyze and dissect and resolve the thing into its elements!

A systematic attack on Rome, the Pope, the Curia. Vituperation of a sort that is nearly as gross as the utterances of Crotus Rubianus and his cronies. Vehement denunciations of abuses of the Holy See. An exhortation to

[8] End., II, no. 274, p. 332. *Deus bone, quantæ sen tenebræ, sen nequitiæ Romanensium*!

revolt and resistance on the part of a Germany that was being exploited by a Papacy bent on plunder. An appeal, against a too often immoral clergy, to the princes and nobles, those who had the power and the duty to maintain Christian liberties, deposing if need be an unworthy or infidel Pope. That should surely have satisfied Hütten.

There is something too in it which must have rejoiced the burghers, so proud of their personal dignity, so impatient of any intermediary between them and God: the affirmation that all Christians are free citizens of the ecclesiastical state; that there are no differences between them except the functional differences; that all are consecrated priests, bishops and popes from the moment of baptism; that ordination is not a sacrament conferring on priests an ineffaceable character, but simply establishes them in a calling from which they may be removed at the will of the civil authority.

It further claimed for all Christians the right to read the Bible and share in the Word of God, the common inheritance of the faithful. It affirmed with an absolute liberalism the right of every man to think and write according to his conscience. It attacked without mercy scholasticism and its representatives in a manner to win the scholars and humanists, the followers of Erasmus, although their spirits must have been somewhat dashed by certain digressions about reforming the universities and certain intemperate attacks upon Aristotle.

At the end, a rough draft of a singular and (regarded as a whole) highly inconsistent program of political,

economic, and social reform. A careless improvisation apparently. One finds here in hopeless confusion: an assertion of the right of priests to marry; a declaration of war on spices, those symbols of luxury; a violent attack on German drunkenness and debauchery; a plan for charitable relief and the suppression of beggars; a peasant tirade against usury, usurers, banking and the Fuggers—all of which must have attracted hundreds and hundreds of malcontents, some because they were suffering from evils that Luther denounced, others because they had hopes of finding and applying remedies to those evils.

There was nothing to marvel at therefore in the fact that this little book, written in German for the use of a whole people, disappeared from the book stores with an unexampled rapidity, that the sale mounted in six days to the unheard-of aggregate of four thousand copies. It concerned everybody and everybody bought it. When he came to Germany to publish the Bull Aleander was able to observe:[9] "Nine-tenths of the Germans are crying: '*Vive* Luther!,' and the rest, while not followers of his, unite at least in the cry: 'Down with Rome!' "

## II

Did Luther tackle the job then, since "the die was cast"? Was he going to bind himself body and soul to the execution of his vast program? Or to be specific, the *Manifesto* being an appeal to the princes, was it Luther's intention

[9] J. Paquier, *Jérôme Aleandre*, p. 154 and all of ch. VII.

to depend on them, to join forces with Hütten and the like in their search for the great man who, assuming the leadership of the German national movement, should lead the attack on Rome: Charles of Hapsburg, or Ferdinand, or—who knows?—perhaps Albert of Brandenburg, the twofold prelate whose arts had combined Mainz and Magdeburg.

Not at all. Luther made no move. He stood still. To the direct intimations of Hütten he made no reply by action or gesture. He wrote; that was all. Wrote the *Manifesto*, but also the *De Captivitate* and the *De Libertate* . . . And in the *Manifesto* even he is plainly of two minds. He marks time. Without, perhaps, being fully aware of it, he hangs back. What is really his plan? To reform Germany or Christianity? A national or a "Catholic" reform? Here are twenty passages that Hütten might have signed, bearing only on Germany. But this idea of reforming the Papacy and the Curia, this appeal to the Council: this concerns all Christendom; this betrays some confusion, no doubt, a very complex mental attitude anyway, and one that must not be reduced to simple formulæ.

Luther lent himself doubtless. But he did not give himself. He remained Luther, the man of the cloister, the man of the tower. The man who at long last created for himself a special certainty of his own; the man who forged for himself that powerful conception of justification by faith, a man with a manner and accent so integral, so thoroughly individual, so touching.

It should not be affirmed that Luther made no choice as

between a national and a universal reformation or a German and a Catholic reformation. He does not feel the need of choosing. The dilemma escapes his notice. He uses words that are current in his vicinity. He draws copiously upon his experience as a German whose eyes have been opened to the state of affairs in Germany. And naturally this great verbal craftsman, this born orator with his need of possessing his public, makes use, in his speeches, his pamphlets, his passionate appeals, of the formulæ, the terms of abuse, the comparisons that come next to hand. But his intentions are pure; essentially he has made no compromise with temporal interests. His political opinions are rudimentary, so un-Machiavellian, so truly ingenuous. The brutal designs of those human vultures, those tight-jawed partisans who urge him forward with the offer, as it were, of a living—what rage they would stir in Luther if some keen observer were to point them out to him and make him explore with a probing finger their baseness and egotism! Magnificent in his naïve and absolute idealism, he circles above these wretches.

Rome has got in his way, blocked his pathway that he was pursuing as a solitary Christian pilgrim with no thought but his soul's salvation and the saving of others. Without consenting to hear his arguments, to explore the depths of a heart overflowing with God, or to let him open its eyes to the testimony of Christ and the Word, Rome has condemned him. So much the worse for Rome! For what was Luther if not the interpreter and the herald of Christ and the Gospel? Rome, then, was condemning Christ and

the Gospel. That was what it all came to. If one could conceive a Rome that was holy and pious, not mercenary, not involved in temporal politics, i. e., purged of all self-seeking, would even such a Rome, if it had condemned him unheard, have seemed to Luther to be anything less than the Antichrist in person?

Rome was in fact not holy. Rome was the mother of vices, a sink of corruption, the fountainhead of evil desires, perverse appetites, damnable cupidities. Rome was acting in Luther's case obliquely and treacherously. Rome was doing battle not for principles but for interests and in order to keep its heel on the neck of down-trodden Germany. Everybody around Luther repeated that; did he not himself know it? He said it; he shouted it with his powerful voice, echoed and sustained by a hundred thousand German voices. But that was incidental. And if, swept away by the torrent that he had unleashed, Luther brought into play all his polemical gifts and denounced a holy war against such a Rome to the clamorous applause of a sadly muddled public, that was only an incident. The Pope was the Antichrist, yes. For the reason precisely that he refused to sanction justification by faith and that theology of the cross which both consoled and exalted Luther.

* * *

As for Luther, the second Luther who is acting at this juncture with a tenfold energy and power, the theologian who is writing in Latin in the manner of his learned colleagues, the Luther that is turning his furrow, pushing

straight ahead, drawing daily more daring conclusions from his basic principles, we are able here only roughly to sketch his story. Our object is merely to plot the curve of his destiny. But an acquaintanceship with this destiny, and with the aspect of this theology, has material interest. What then was Luther about in these troubled months? He was formulating a doctrine with regard to the Church.

A burning subject. What Church? A German church, organized hierarchically with the primate of Germany at its head in place of the Roman pontiff? A Catholic and truly Œcumenical church, the Roman church purged of its imperfections and regenerated? But how? By some new plan of centralization—a federation of national churches? Quite abstract problems of the sort that occur to historians. No such questions presented themselves to Luther. And nothing affords us more insight into his deeper emotions than his utter indifference to such considerations.

The church of which he defined his conception in 1520, after some preliminary alarms and excursions, was not a vast powerful organization like the Church of Rome, that great secular institution which, grouping in dioceses all the men who have received baptism, imposes upon them the authority of consecrated priests, who preach a dogmatic creed and purvey divine Grace through the magical channel of the several sacraments, all this with the full support of the temporal powers. To this visible and, so to speak, material church, Luther opposed his true church, the church invisible. It was made up, for its part, of only

those who lived in the true faith, of those who, believing in the same truths, perceiving the same aspects of the divinity, anticipating the same celestial beatitude, found themselves united, not by external bonds in a hierarchic subjection to the Pope, but rather by intimate secret ties, which knit heart to heart and soul to soul, in a profound communion in the joys of the spirit.

Invisible ties with all that the words imply. For how would these true believers dare to set themselves off from the mass all around them? Or how could they take it upon themselves to proclaim themselves true believers by uniting together in special groups, in Pharisaic and hypocritical "communions of saints"? Sectarian religion was never to Luther's taste. Let the true believers, he said, plunge deeply into the world, not withdraw from it; let them rest content with being the leaven which leavens the lump, the warm living soul which gives life to a heavy and often cold body.

Within the organization there should be no distinction between Christians and no hierarchy. All should be alike, all those who by baptism, the Gospel, and faith have become sons of God. All priests. And if some among them are charged more especially with the duties of teaching and preaching, let them not believe themselves superior in essence; they are merely functionaries dedicated to a human task and may be deposed by the same power which has appointed them. In like manner, if some institutions are elaborated, if in a monarchical state a prince, acting in his capacity as a member of the community of believers,

or if in a democratic state the appointed representatives of the sovereign people take steps to organize the teaching of the Word, to establish a body of qualified ministers, or to provide towns and villages with adequate schools, it should be quite plain that none of these arrangements or institutions in any way have the weight of divine authority.

There is not, there has never been, there never will be a religious cabal of any sort which can pretend it is authorized by God himself to interpret the Word; there is none which can, on the basis of any such claim, exact blind submission in matters of conscience; there is none, finally, which has the right to appeal to the secular arm to impose upon men predetermined beliefs or sacramental observances. "If anyone does not desire baptism let him forego it," Luther says categorically in 1521. A monstrous utterance to have come from this priest.[10] And he adds (the year, note, is 1521): "Whoever wishes to abstain from communion has the right. The same applies to confession." A year later, in 1522, the same profession: "Faith is something quite free. Hearts cannot be forced, not even by quartering. At the most you will only succeed in constraining the weak to lie and speak otherwise than they think in their innermost hearts." [11] The Luther of 1520 knew but one remedy for indifference, hostility, unbelief: to preach the Word and allow it to operate. "If this has no effect, force would have even less, much less, even if it were to plunge the whole world in a bath of blood. Heresy

[10] *Von der Beichte*, W., VIII, p. 157 quoted by Strohl II, 325.
[11] *Ibid.*, and W., XI, p. 264.

is a spiritual force. It cannot be struck with iron or burned with fire or drowned with water. But there is the Word of God; that is what will triumph!"

The church of a fervent monk. The cloistered dream of a man who has no traffic with the world. A splendid idealism, one which, in the morning of the century, rings pure and sweet.

* * *

Thus does Luther destroy. He denies. From the Catholic Church with its powerful hierarchy, its ancient traditions, its firm territorial and juridical acquisitions, from the tangible sharply outlined church, competing in vigor with rival churches, from the church which is guardian of a civilization, upholding in Europe an effective unity of culture and tradition, from this grandiose secular structure, a true heritage from the Roman Empire, Luther turns away with indifference. On December 10, 1520, he burns the Bull *Exsurge* at Wittenberg. But a year before in the *Resolutiones* of the Leipzig theses he had written: "I wish to be free. I do not wish to become the slave of any authority, whether that of a Council or of any other power, or of the University or the Pope. For I shall proclaim with confidence what I believe to be true, whether it is advanced by a Catholic or a heretic, whether it is authorized or not by I care not what authority." After such declarations there was nothing left of the ancient Church. It was gone, root and branch. Quite razed to the ground.

But what reconstruction is planned? And how? On

what basis? The Law? But does not Luther wear himself out insisting:—The Christian is freed of the Mosaic Law; and not merely of the laws of ceremonial which Moses gave to the Jews, but of the Decalog also, of those ten commandments that Moses gave to the Jews. To the Jew, yes, but not to Christians. As for Moses—a doctor, a great doctor doubtless. But a legislator for us who are Christians? Hardly. The law? What have Christians to do with that? Did not Christ suppress it and vanquish it? Born under it, did he not bow to its exigencies in order to redeem all those whom its weight was crushing? The law? Christ has given us the Gospel, its opposite.

The Word, then, perhaps? But what sense is one to attach to this vocable, so dear to Luther, which he so often repeated with such love and such special tenderness? What is this Word? The sum total of the holy books? Did Luther, in denying the authority of the Pope, intend to create for his own purposes a Pope out of paper? At this date he had not thought of that. He had no intention of yielding that independence as a Christian, which he had so jealously guarded from interference on the part of all earthly potentates, to a mere book, even though that book was the Bible, which, however, he was destined to translate in its entirety into German and present to the German people, a gift the magnificent richness of which was at times to alarm him. Faith did not depend on any text, however important. Faith could not be bound by the letter, whatever its origin. It was mistress of all of the texts. It had the right to interpret all texts by virtue of its self-

derived certainty. Faith applies to the Word directly, and the Word is not just the Scripture, a dead letter, "the mean little wicker basket in which Moses was hidden." It is Moses himself, something living and operative, immaterial, a spirit, a voice which fills the whole world. It is the message of grace, the promise of salvation, the revelation of our redemption.

Thus the Luther of the more inspired years places man and his God face to face. No intermediaries between. "It is necessary that I understand God for myself," he says. But how understand? By subscribing rationally to a creed or a body of doctrine? What nonsense! "The Word can be preached, but no one but God can impress it on the human heart." There is no arbiter of things spiritual on this earth except "the man who bears in his heart the true faith in God." This cuts under everything which is vain, superfluous or harmful: all dogma defining what must be believed by everyone, always, and everywhere; the sacerdotal caste, which assumes absurdly and blasphemously the right to purvey God's grace to the faithful; last of all, the institution of monasticism with its monks proudly offering to God, as so many sacrifices, their barren prayers and vainglorious mortifications. This cuts under everything. Faith alone remains, that intimate contact of the wretched soul, fully conscious of its wretchedness, with the prodigious, the unimaginable goodness of God; the mystic nuptials of a sick soul and a God who, raising it from its ignominy, takes upon Himself its inexpiable sins and bestows in return the gift of his wisdom and beatitude.

But how, on the basis of such a relationship between man and his Creator, on the basis of this conception of an invisible church secretly uniting souls in a single communion of faith, would the Luther of 1520 have constructed a church to take the place of the Church of Rome which he sought to destroy by negation, a church in harmony with the feelings that welled in his heart, with that ardent piety which seethed in his bosom, with the faith which he upheld and by which he was also upheld?

## III

And besides, the words build, erect, construct were nowhere in that vocabulary which Luther employed to interpret his thoughts and emotions and to unlock his heart.

It was clear that his faith did not drive him to say to the world: "I wish not to know you. You are evil; you are sin, ugliness and injustice. I intend to avoid you." Monastic seclusion? He had turned his back upon that and whole-heartedly condemned all asceticism. God created the world. God put us here. We must stay where we are placed. We must apply ourselves conscientiously to our daily task. The peasant who plows, the servant who sweeps, the blacksmith who blows the bellows are performing as laudable a service as the good evangelical preacher whose business it is to indoctrinate Christian people—a more laudable service than that of the lazy monk as he mutters his perpetual paternosters. Luther says this in 1520; he will go

on saying it with an increasing emphasis; the enthusiasm such words, coming as they do from a priest and a man of God who thereby is stripping himself of his halo, arouse among the industrious townsmen, among the disciplined and conscientious masses whose most humble tasks he here glorifies, is easy to be imagined.

As for the world, Luther's faith makes him master of it. He treats it in the manner of Abraham, who had wives, children, servants, all of these as if they were nothing, since the patriarch knew that true happiness is derived from spiritual riches alone. Shall one live in the world? Of course. Make use of the gifts that it offers, use them freely, honestly, and with an untroubled mind. Enjoyments of heart and of senses; all natural delights and enjoyments: a glass of old sun-kissed wine, the lightness and supple grace of a young animal, the deep brilliance of a living glance, the throat of a woman bending under a kiss, the merry spontaneous affection of children. Let the Christian feast to satiety on these treasures which God spreads with a lavish hand; let him feel no compunction. Let him use the gifts of the Father in all tranquillity. But let him always be ready to put them aside. In the very moment of enjoying, let him learn inwardly to renounce them. Let him see them as they really are, the mise-en-scène of a theatre especially devised by God to enable man therein to discover his faith.

And how would the Christian hero, this king on whom God has conferred the crown and the sceptre, let himself be other than master of the things of this world? Without

hurry or apprehension, Luther calmly displays his Christian mastery over sin, death, and evil, the entire terrestial host. He does not flee the powers of evil. He does not fear them. His full security makes him master; he knows that none of them, neither Satan, nor death, nor hunger, nor thirst, nor fire, nor sword have a hold on his actual self. More than that, he turns them to his own ends, bends them to his needs, extracting from each its contrary, wresting virtue from sin and wealth from poverty.

* * *

Thus Faith gives Luther a royal mastery over the world. Faith. Complete trust in God. But this trust which inspires him, which sustains him at every turn, explains also his utter disregard of practical achievement and his contempt for well ordered construction: this was one of the most salient and most constant qualities of his genius.

A reformer? There may be some ground for denying that title to the father of the Reformation. A leader of men. He responded doubtless to the call of his God. But his deepest wish was himself to be led wheresoever God chose to lead him, with the blind confidence of a child who walks with his hand in his father's and asks no questions. Organize? Legislate? Construct? To what end? Why attach such importance to vanities? That purely spiritual communion, the Church invisible, is present wherever true believers dwell and manifest their faith. That is all that matters. The rest, the recruitment of ministers, the construction of groups, is a matter of no impor-

tance. Why strive for an ultimate solution? Temporary arrangements suffice.

As for treating with temporal princes to secure for God's doctrine the most favorable opportunity to develop and ramify, this also is vain. Let princes play politics. That is public business. And what has public business to do with the intimate faith of a Christian? Let the State protect the Church and defend her when she is unjustly attacked; and secure her properties if she has any, thus freeing the faithful from distracting anxieties so that they shall be free to give themselves unreservedly to that which alone concerns a Christian. But even this is of no especial concern. Would such vast affairs as the triumph of the Gospel, the security of the Church of God, depend upon human efforts? Luther knows they would not: "It is by the Word that the world has been vanquished and the Church has been saved. By the Word it will be restored!" This is in 1520.[12] It anticipates and foreshadows something much better known, Luther's proud declaration to the Elector when, stirred by news which had reached him from Wittenberg, he determined to break the silence of his retreat in the Wartburg:[13] "Your Electoral Grace should do nothing to remedy this situation. For God does not wish, nor will He tolerate, anxiety or remedial measures on the part of your Electoral Grace or on my part. He desires that we trust everything to His hands!"

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[12] Other texts quoted in Will, p. 198-200.
[13] Cf. further, notes 150 to 153.

Complete self-abandon, perfect peace in God. This explains, let us note in passing, that detachment, that indifference of Luther's with regard to morals with which he has been so often bitterly reproached. We know with what emphasis Luther established and how firmly he continued to believe in his distinction between the pious man and the Christian. "Bear in mind that to be a pious man and accomplish many great works and lead an honorable and virtuous life is one thing: to be a Christian is something quite different." Being just and pious, then, does not make one a Christian. To become that one has to receive God into one's heart . . . Why worry, then, about mere morality? It cannot be attained by an exercise of the human will. It is a by-product of faith. If a man has God in him, if God acts on a man, then the human will, transformed by the Holy Spirit, is naturally capable of fine and good actions. And this transformation is not momentary. It is achieved for all time. Transformed by the Spirit, the will "desires, loves, cherishes always the good, as formerly it desired, loved and cherished evil." Quietistic abandonment, doubtless. But when storms, threats, suffering and persecution afflict the believer, then this absolute trust in God will prove in his heart an inexhaustible fountain of patience, force, energy, heroism: *Ein' feste Burg ist unser Gott*! A mighty fortress is our God! [14] A cry from the depths of Luther's very soul. This feeling, which Luther twenty

[14] For all this, Will, p. 248-249.

times conveyed by his life, endowed him with a joy and a fortitude really superhuman, such joy and such fortitude as he displayed at Worms.

* * *

Luther at Worms. How is it that so many good people have been able to conceive this dramatic episode only in the turgid and rather ridiculous terms of a Paul Delaroche? Let us try to view this scene, so important to an intimate understanding of Luther, with fresh insight.

Why did Luther go to the diet? In what state of mind? People never think of asking. Tradition hides what is astonishing. We repeat by rote merely: "Summoned before the assembly, Luther went there with a safe conduct. And there . . ." But is the mere fact of his going so commonplace?

A Bull had placed him under the ban of all Christendom. That Bull had to be executed. In whose hands was the power to give to its prescriptions a cruel reality? The Emperor's, or to speak more accurately, it was in the hands of the King of the Romans. But Charles was a very young man, almost unknown in Germany, lacking wide experience, lacking credit, lacking personal force: obliged therefore to make concessions to the princes. One of these especially had a word to put in: the Elector of Saxony, Frederick the Wise. Frederick was protecting Luther. The other potentates did not all share his views. But all as territorial sovereigns felt their solidarity with him. All made a tight ring, when any question arose of the rights

of their subjects or of rights that the Emperor claimed at their hands. Besides, the Bull was disputed. It was in ill favor. Even in Rome some people had been disturbed at seeing the Pope lend his ear to counsels of violence. And many in Germany who did not sympathize with all Luther's innovating tendencies were scandalized nevertheless at seeing him condemned without his error having been demonstrated. Moreover Erasmus's strategy at the moment was to keep the way clear for revision by declaring, and pretending to believe, that the Bull was spurious.

The two legates chosen by the Holy See, Aleander and Caracciolo, therefore found themselves in a difficult situation. They went to Frederick and asked him to burn Luther's writings and secure his person. The Elector at the end of 1520 was temporizing, but held out slight encouragement. Would he arrest Luther? No. The man had appealed from the Papal sentence, which had the effect of suspending it. Would he burn his writings? No. They had not been enough examined and discussed to justify such a proceeding. It would be better to have the monk appear in person before impartial and enlightened judges.

Thus originated, to the great disgust of the nuncios, the idea of having Luther appear before the diet. It gained ground in the face of countless obstacles which do not concern us; it is not to our present purpose to reconstruct or even to summarize the history of the Reichstag of 1521; it has just been surveyed in an excellent book by Paul Kalkoff. On March 6, 1521, Charles of Hapsburg signed a safe conduct for his "honorable, dear and devoted" Mar-

tin Luther. On March 26, Black Friday, this safe conduct was presented to the monk by the imperial herald Gaspard Sturm. And on April 2, in a carriage preceded by Sturm and containing four persons, one being an Augustinian brother to keep Luther company in accordance with the monastic rules, Martin Luther set out for the imperial city.

This was all very simple. But what did this summons signify? At the time it reached Luther the diet had long been concerned about him. As early as February 13, Aleander had made a long speech to the deputies about the affair. On the nineteenth, the Reichstag had declared that it could not see its way to condemning a German unheard, and had raised the thorny subject of Germany's grievances against Rome. Here Charles had intervened. He had declared that if Luther came it would not be for discussion. They would ask him if he acknowledged the writings published in his name and whether or not he wished to retract the errors contained therein. And on the same day that the herald Sturm handed Luther his safe conduct, an edict was published in Germany, condemning the heresiarch's writings to be burned.

* * *

All this Luther knew. He knew that Aleander was waging a furious campaign and that he had preserved an influence over the King of the Romans to the strength of which the edict of the twenty-sixth bore eloquent testimony. He knew likewise that he was to be asked simply to retract. Then why go to Worms? In a letter to Spalatin,

dated March 19—before the safe conduct had been delivered to him—he declared quite definitely: "I shall reply to the Emperor Charles that if I am summoned merely to make a retraction I shall not go to Worms. There would be nothing to be gained by the journey. It would be as though I had already made the journey thither and back again." [15] Yet on March 26 he received the herald and on April 2 he set out. Why was this?

A possible clew may be found in his letter of the 19th to Spalatin. I will not go to Worms to make a retraction, he said. But he added: "If later the Emperor summons me to the stake and declares me, as a result of my refusal, an 'enemy of the Empire,' I shall not abandon the Word. I am perfectly certain that these men of blood will not stop short of taking my life; but I prefer, if possible, that the papists alone shall be guilty of my death." [16] This displays a startling enough exaltation. Unless one is familiar with Luther and his absolute trust in God.

Luther did not set out for Worms merely as a man who respects the constituted authorities and who, on receiving a summons, goes without any further hesitancy or reflection. Luther went to Worms like a man who is walking on coals. Marching straight ahead, inwardly resolved on self-immolation, sustained moreover by that invincible faith in his ultimate destiny that any man draws in a moment of

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[15] End., III, no. 414, p. 113: *Respondebo ergo Carolo Imperatori, solius palinodiae causa vocatum me non venturums quando quidem idem sit ac si jam illuc venissem et huc rediissem.*

[16] End., *ibid. Certissimum autem habeo, illos non quieturos sanquinarios, donec occiderint me.*

danger from some vital depths and which, in Luther's case, took the form of a blind and unshakable faith in God. Luther went to Worms as to a martyrdom or a triumph, two aspects, when all is said, of the same experience. But a triumph, be it understood, through God and before God. It was not upon men and on human aid that he counted. On the contrary, he repudiated them utterly. Never was his idealism purer or more inflexible than then. Defending himself on February 27 against a charge of violence, or of appealing to violence, he wrote: [17] "Of this fault I am guiltless. It is not by the sword that I have urged German nobles to check Roman inroads, but by resolutions and decrees, a much easier task. To wage war on an unarmed mob of priests would be like waging war on women and children." And a little earlier, January 16, he had said to the same correspondent: "I should not wish force or slaughter to enter into the fight for the Gospel. Even the Antichrist has not thus far used violence, and will in his turn be broken by the Word alone."

It is all very well for sleek controversialists with their feet on the fender to lavish upon us the assurance that Luther incurred no risk in answering his summons, that his journey to Worms involved no danger or possibility of miscarriage. At this crucial moment, in this troubled Germany, at this time when even the dullest were conscious of the bulk and importance of the opposing forces involved, the thought of John Huss and his death at Constance of

[17] End., III, no. 390, p. 73.

course haunted Luther's mind and the minds of all of his friends, and doubtless of all of his enemies. What of that? God was urging him, God was driving him on. He no longer hesitated. He set off, to bear witness to his faith, to testify to his God.

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An anxious and triumphal journey. At Erfurt his reception was enthusiastic and imposing. The university where he had studied received Luther as a distinguished guest. He preached to the Augustinians, declared heretic though he was, in the very chapel of his former monastery. He preached also at Gotha and at Eisenach. He was ill, however; he complained of unspecified maladies. The thought of Satan, of his snares and pitfalls, never left him. But neither did his heroism, which took the form of an innate and passionate buoyancy giving him the strength to face all. What mattered the devil? "Christ lives," he wrote to Spalatin from Frankfurt on April 14. "Christ lives and we shall enter Frankfurt in spite of all the gates of Hell and of all the powers of the air." [18] That was April 14. On the eve of April 15, his disciple Bucer, who had been sent ahead, rejoined him at Oppenheim.

Storms were brewing upon the horizon at Worms. The princes were badgering Charles, who had neither money nor troops. The nuncios were in a panic. The populace in

[18] End., III, no. 420, p. 121: *Verum Christus vivit, et intrabimus Vormaciam, invitis omnibus portis inferni et potentatibus aëris.*—There is a curious account of his sojourn in Worms by Luther in Cordatus's compilation (*Tischreden*, ed. Weimar, III, p. 281-287).

the streets and under the windows where they lodged were singing the *Litanies of the Germans*, which were full of fanatical abuse. Demonstrations against the clergy, the monks, against people of wealth, were breaking out in the cities and in the country as well. The popularity of the excommunicated Augustinian continued to grow. His portrait was everywhere, along with the portrait of Hütten. The latter, from the heights of Ebernburg, the von Sickingen stronghold, was showering down snowdrifts of pamphlets upon Germany. A hungry and brutal nobility with its hand at the sword hilt was fairly shaking with impatience. They were hot for the quarry; they awaited only the signal from Ebernburg.

There were secret cabals. If Luther should plunge now into all this seething confusion . . . Both his friends and his enemies were uneasy about his coming. Finally a plan was conceived: to divert the traveler from Worms to Ebernburg. Up there in safety, under Sickingen's protection, under Hütten's surveillance, Luther would have no cause to fear Huss's fate. He could wait, see what came, open parley. That was what Bucer came to propose. He refused categorically.

He went to Worms. No obstacle, no person could stop him. He would enter the city. He would thrust his foot in the jaws and between the great teeth of Behemoth as a testimony to Christ and would leave all things in His hands. A force had been set in motion. It was not to be stopped. On April 16 he entered Worms. A hundred

horses escorted his carriage. Two thousand people followed him to his lodgings. And next day, the seventeenth, he was brought for the first time into the presence of the Emperor.

The occasion was disappointing. To the official from Trier who asked him two questions: whether he recognized as his own all the books published under his name, and whether or not he retracted his errors, he replied in a low tone, much moved apparently, that he renounced none of his books, and as for the rest the question was so grave a one that he humbly begged a further extension of time. This request produced much astonishment; disappointment prevailed. He was given twenty-four hours, and that somewhat grudgingly. The next day, April 18, 1521, a Tuesday, Luther reappeared around six o'clock at the very end of the session in the stuffy, overcrowded room that was lighted with torches. This time he spoke plainly.

His books? They were of three sorts. One comprised expositions of Christian doctrine and these were so orthodox that even his enemies regarded them as salutary . . . None of these would require retraction. The second category: fundamental attacks on the papacy and on papal practices. Here also there was nothing to retract. To retract would be opening the doors and windows to the Antichrist. The last group: occasional writings directed against adversaries who had given him provocation. A bit too incisive, perhaps. But still, it was tyranny and impiety that he had been combatting. Instead of his being con-

demned without a hearing, let judges be appointed; let his ideas be discussed, let them show him wherein these works were pernicious.

The official from Trier then spoke. "No discussion. Did he retract, yes or no?" Then the famous declaration, so many versions of which at once became current in Germany. The most likely is here translated: [19] "Unless I shall be convinced by Scriptural evidence or by a rational argument (for I do not confide solely in the Pope and the Councils: it is clear they have erred too often and have contradicted themselves), I am bound by the texts I have cited; my conscience is bound by God's words. Retract anything whatsoever I neither can nor will. For to act against one's conscience is neither safe nor honorable. May God be my help, *Amen*!"

There was great confusion. In the midst of objurgations and plaudits Luther withdrew. He went back to the inn. With raised hands, catching sight of his friends at a distance, he cried twice: "*Ich bin hindurch*: I have come away, I have come away!" The next day the whole world heard of the great refusal of Luther, who "is writing against the Pope." And those who loved him and thought they knew him were amazed at an audacity the superhuman reason for which eluded them.

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[19] *Deutsche Reichstagsakten unter K. Karl* V, ed. Wrede, II, 555: "*Nisi convictus fuero testimoniis Scripturarum aut ratione evidenti . . . victus sum Scripturis a me adductis et capta conscientia in verbis Dei; revocare neque possum neque volo quicquam, cum contra conscientiam agere neque tutum neque integrum sit. Gott helf mir, Amen.*" See, in Wrede, *loc. cit.*, the discussion of the traditional conclusion, which he rejects: *Hie stehe ich, ich Kann nicht anders.*

"He came back the next day, saying that it was true that he had written such and such things . . . and that until someone should convince him to the contrary, he would stand back of what he had said and not shrink from death on account of it." In such terms the secretary of the Portuguese business headquarters at Anvers related to the King of Portugal, in a letter dated from Berg op Zoom, April 25 (for news flew fast), the famous scene of the eighteenth. "Among other notable incidents, it is said that the Papal nuncio dropped dead on the spot." He added: "The whole German people and all of the potentates have been won. It looks to me as if he would get off this time." [20]

A whole people in fact pressed about him, adopted him, brooded over him tenderly, trusted him with alarming completeness. He had not yielded. Vainly had the Archbishop of Trier, his official, Cochlæus, and others exhausted themselves in the effort to make him give ground. Luther did not budge. Luther made no denial. An attitude which might well have cost him dear. But he gave that no thought. Or if he did think of that, in the depths of his visionary soul amid all the violent intensities of a prophet emerging from solitude to hurl brutal naked truths at monarchs and potentates, it was doubtless to cherish some dream of martyrdom suggested by John Huss and Savonarola.

"I am letting myself be imprisoned and hidden, I do

[20] This curious text is found in Braamcamp, *Noticias da Feitoria de Flandres*, Lisbon, 1920, p. 116.

not as yet myself know where," he informs Lucas Cranach on April 28, on the eve of his abduction. "Ah, how much I should have preferred death at the hands of the tyrants, especially Duke George in a rage! But I ought not to disregard the advice of well-meaning people, until the appointed time." [21] There is disappointment in these lines and also a sort of wish to justify himself to his friends: what, was all that fuss to have only this consequence? And yet he had made his sacrifice. Note again that letter to Spalatin on March 19. Read, besides, that letter from Hütten to Luther of April 20: "Two days after the great refusal," wrote the knight, "you shall not lack defenders, or *if need be avengers*." [22] And the sentence from Ruy Fernandez cited above: "It looks to me as if he *would get off* this time." This will be enough to dissuade one from the belief, entertained in some quarters, that Luther ran no risks at Worms, or from putting cruel misconstructions on the quite sincere sentiments that Luther expressed in the course of these days when an inward exaltation, a sort of religious fever lifted him to a plane above everybody, including himself.

Luther's heroism at Worms is not the audacity of a combatant who leaps straight at the enemy, seeks to down him decisively, make him cry for mercy. It is all very well for Hütten to write: "I see that swords, bows, ar-

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[21] Quoted in End., III, no. 426, p. 128; full text in E., LIII, no. 28, p. 64.
[22] End., III, no. 424, p. 126, dated from Ebernburg. "*Opus esse video gladiis et arcubus, sagittis et bombardis ut obsistatur cacodæmonum insaniae . . . Non carebis defensoribus, neque derunt unquam vindices tibi.*"

rows, bullets are needed to withstand the folly of these wretched devils." Or for him to regret the necessity of inaction, but for which "I would have stirred up a demonstration in the city itself against these mitred varlets." [23] Luther's heroism is entirely spiritual. He feels himself to be in constant touch with the invisible world, as Mr. Will has so well expressed it in his fine book *Christian Liberty*.[24] He knows he has God on his side, that his doctrine is invincible, that his enemies are only tools of Satan. He has God in his power as he daringly phrased it in the Treatise on Liberty: *Wir sind Gottes machtig*, and the deep delight of possessing Him thus in his innermost core aroused in him the Dionysian joy which maintained this lover of the absolute so high above other men in his state of possessive repletion.

Likewise, need it be repeated? One should guard against making the *Contra Conscientiam agere* at Worms into a proclamation, in the teeth of the elder world, of what we call liberty of conscience or freedom of thought. Luther never was a "liberal"; even to speak the word in connection with him is a pure anachronism. On this point too Mr. Will well says: "His conscience was haunted less by a desire for emancipation than by an inner compulsion." [25] He had no thought of defending the thesis that everyone should use his own faculties as suits him or of laying down the law on the subject of human reasoning. On the con-

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[23] *Ibid.*: *Alioqui ad ipsos muros concitassem aliquam turbam pileatis istis.*
[24] Cf. notably, p. 161-163.
[25] P. 161.

trary his intent was to subject reason and conscience to the only sanction he recognized. He did not seek this sanction outside of himself, reverting like a Catholic to the Church, to tradition, to authority. He sought it within. It was that Word of God which he conceived as a living force, that Word of God which creates in each one of us a compulsion more powerful than any constraint.

But men's words have an independent life also. What matters the meaning that Luther attached to his protestations? They are his already no longer. Each man in the throng that surrounded Luther and that served so well to protect him from danger—politicians, scholars, knights, citizens, humble folk and harassed clerks—each one heard a different sound when the monk spoke. Each put the force of his own desires behind Luther's acts. And for one hour Luther satisfied all; each, that is, as he listened was able to go on enjoying his special dream in the firm belief that this inspired prophet was lending it the support of his powerful voice. Illusions of an hour; they could not outlast it. Between these divergent realisms and that idealism of his, which disdained all contingencies, at the very moment when agreement seemed most complete, the abyss was already yawning.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE MONTHS IN THE WARTBURG

ON May 4, 1521, a wagon was traversing the forest that lay beyond Altenstein on the Gotha road. It bore Martin Luther, who was returning to Wittenberg after a visit to his relatives. Two men accompanied him, his colleague Amsdorf and his Augustinian confrére John Petzensteiner, the traveling companion required by the rules of the order. Suddenly some riders burst upon them. The companion fled in a panic. The driver put up a fight. Amsdorf raised a clamor and made some pretended resistance. Luther, dragged off into the woods and thrust on a horse, was brought at night by a roundabout way to a lofty Thuringian stronghold. Dressed as a Junker, with a golden chain about his neck, a sword at his side, long hair and a beard, "Sir George" was to stay there for nearly a year, from May 4, 1521, to March, 1522.

Elector Frederick, a sly old fox, eager to avoid surrendering Luther but also to avoid open disrespect to the Emperor, had approved the ingenious stroke. By this means, by this well planned and secret abduction, he was guarding the heretic whom his enemies pictured as being already at bay or reduced to seek refuge in Denmark or

Bohemia. He was sheltering Luther from the terrible consequences of the edict which Aleander, with an artful persistence, had at last extracted from Charles V and his counsellors and which had been solemnly read to the Reichstag in its session of May 15, 1521. Frederick's astuteness in resolving a difficult dilemma was to have an important effect at the start on Luther's career; it nipped that career in the bud, in a manner that deserves to be studied and seriously regarded—all the more because the event is frequently underestimated.

## I

Germany was in a ferment. This succession of dramatic events—the imperial election with all the complications involved, the consecration of the new Emperor at Aix-la-Chapelle, the events at Worms, the drawing up of the Hundred Grievances of the German nation against Rome by a coalition of Catholics and partisans of Luther, Luther's great refusal, to cap the climax, his courage and obstinacy—all this had produced an unbearable tension. And the pamphlets of Hütten, of his partisans, of Luther himself had had the result of producing a furious intellectual ferment.

It is not doing justice to all these writings to study them in the wretched Erlangen octavos or in the thick Weimar Quartos. In these forms they repel the interest of all but laborious scholars coldly seeking citations and working out parallelisms. Whoever prefers really to read them for

pleasure and mental stimulus, and in order to feel himself swept by the fire that is in them, should go to the original editions, the pamphlets themselves in the form in which they emerged from the Wittenberg presses: light, flexible, plain, but clear in typography and speaking eloquently to the eye, to the mind, to the imagination. There they are with clear, sonorous titles, the page decoratively framed in the German manner; hardly ever a date or a publisher's imprint, but upon the first page in big generous letters the resounding name of Brother Martin Luther, Augustinian of Wittenberg. Often, too, an engraving to redeem him from anonymity or the state of a pure intelligence. A man. Flesh and bones. Observe in the portrait, above the square chin and bony cheeks, dominating the craggy features, those eyes, whose lustre and whose immobility struck so many contemporaries, those eyes in which his enemies read intimations of something demonic, but whose strange fascination was everywhere palpable, even when words failed to convey the effect. "How deep this monk's eyes are! His mind must foster strange fancies!" This remark of Caïetan's impressed itself upon Luther; [1] he could easily have recorded others.

On the very first page, formulæ are couched ready to spring at the reader. *Liber, dandidum et liberum lectorem opto*! This appeal appears underneath a picture of the dead Christ removed from the Cross at the opening of the *Resolutiones* of 1518, which were read throughout Eu-

[1] *Tischreden*, W., II, 421: *Cardinalis Augustae dixit de me: iste frater habet profundos oculos; ideo et mirabiles phantasias in capite habet.*

rope. In the *De abroganda Missa* of 1521, just below the title are the words: *Leo ruguiet, quis non timebit?* A question couched in the language of Amos, which carries one back, on the wings of prophecy to the harsh and violent Judean. But when one is launched on the text how one feels at once stirred! What an artless yet studied mixture of reassuring and disquieting statements! Take the title: *De abroganda Missa.* But to strike at the Mass is to strike at Christ, is it not? And yet opening the book one sees first of all JHESUS in capital letters. The very first word. Beneath it, this dedication: "To my brothers of the Augustinian monastery of Wittenberg: the grace and the peace of Christ be with them!" Can the author of such a book be other than a faithful Christian and a devoted monk? Clearly not. On the following page one reads: PROTESTATION. Underneath this arresting heading, a vehement declaration: "I protest at the opening of this book against those who, like fools, will cry out against me that I am speaking against the rite of the Church, the decisions of the Fathers, the authentic histories, and accepted usage." [2] How well this seems calculated to disturb timid readers! But the method is the same in the *Resolutiones.* The same shifting positions. First of all a respectful and filial preface addressed to Staupitz, that moderate, conciliatory man, revered as the light of his order. Then a letter to Leo X, grave but forceful. Furthermore, in plain sight,

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[2] *De Abroganda Missa Privata,* ed. of 1521 (Bib. Strassburg, E. 151, 124) fo. Aiii: PROTESTOR IMPRIMIS ADVERSUS eos qui insanis vocibus sunt in me clamaturi quod, etc. . . .

a great declaration: "I shall say nothing, I shall affirm nothing except what can be sustained by the authority first of all of the Holy Scriptures; then by that of the Fathers whom the Roman Church recognizes." [3] Reassuring orthodoxy. But what about the scholastic doctors? "In accordance with Christian rights and liberties," he proceeds, "I shall take what is good in them; I shall reject the rest." Will this alarm the fearful? Already, in two short effective lines, Luther sets them at rest: "Heretic? Whatever my enemies say or do, that I never shall be!" [4] In both books, the same way of proceeding, the same disturbing mixture of revolutionary temerities and orthodox protestations. It is hard to defend one's self against such a compound. One is not in the presence of a reasonable reason or of straight, clear logic. One is faced with a creature whose life asserts itself in the middle of contradictions and conflicts. A wretched creature who is battling and protesting against the inexorable laws of thought and sometimes cuts loose from them. A strong man who with one leap establishes himself in the absolute, becomes master of contingencies by despising them, takes and ravishes passionate hearts.

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Then, too, there was Hütten. There were the others, all the others, the supernumerary writers, the anonymous, the

[3] *Resolutiones Disputationum de Indulgentiarum virtute*, ed. of 1518, Wittenberg (Bib. Strassburg, E. 151, 126) fo. A 4 v°: *Primum protestor me prorsus nihil dicere aut tenere velle nisi quod in et ex Sacris Litteris . . . habetur et haberi potest.*

[4] *Ibid., Errare quidem potero, sed haereticus non ero.*

authors of countless pamphlets, *Flugschriften*, ardent pamphlets in the vernacular of a sort to burst open all doors. There were the sermons, the interchanges, the vehement utterances of Luther's friends. There was the old leaven of social hatreds, class rivalries, antagonism of interests. And beyond all that, spoken interchange, sharp words finding lodgment in hearts and minds, unforgettable words. As historians, we are bound to explain Luther cautiously with the aid of Luther. Theologians, on the other hand, commentate, interpret, develop their exegesis, and that too is good. But it was neither as historians nor as theologians that the men of that age heard Luther when he cried: "No tariff on our thoughts: *Gedanken sind Zollfrei*!" Before them arose the clear, inescapable and idealized image of the monk who, before the legates of the Sovereign Pontiff, before the Emperor himself sitting in his majesty, had stood fast and when bidden to retract had cried, No! Within them the words which the monk had shouted to the winds, and which overleaped and for long were destined to overleap the holiest and the highest barriers into the absolute, lived a strange, active and, as it were, fructifying life.

Nothing binds the human soul. To this view Martin Luther had repeatedly given utterance. The soul is eternal and masters the world. How can it be bound externally; how can it listen to other mandates than its own? Popes, Councils, Doctors are of no account. The letter even of Holy Writ does not count. If the soul seeks within itself and not elsewhere its own truth, it will find it. Theo-

logians are justified in observing, however, that Luther denied the soul any strictly private initiative, intelligence or will and held that the soul's mastery over the world was directly proportional to the degree in which God possessed and animated it. But those who were avidly drinking the intoxicating wine of revolt from the very lips of the embattled monk cared little for this. All that mattered to them was that, in the hour when he was overthrowing all the authorities and pulverizing with powerful blows the most deeply rooted and most venerated beliefs of his time, he was offering them in return, in order that they might not lack the necessary place for the free development of their ideas, the refuge of his invisible church, to which all should be drawn by common revelation and the support of his doctrine of justification, a doctrine marvelously adapted, obviously, to reassure, sustain and unite on the basis of common experiences those who had chosen, with a mixture of regret and audacity, to become renegades from Catholicism.

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Thus into this uneasy and overwrought Germany the Lutheran drama came as an additional cause of disturbances. The mysterious abduction of May 4 gave the final provocation to ill-controlled passions. What had befallen him, this Luther whom engravings showed side by side with Hütten as a champion of German rights and of German sentiment? Was it Sickingen who had seized him for his own greater security? Or had Aleander done this,

in spite of the safe conduct? Or had Behem, perhaps, a noble and an enemy of Elector Frederick's, hit upon this plan to deprive Frederick of his protegé? Dark stories were current. "They" had killed him. Luther's bleeding corpse had been found, pierced with dagger strokes, at the bottom of a mine shaft. Indignation swelled. Regret also. Read for instance in Dürer's journal.[5] The great painter was at Anvers when the news reached him on Friday, May 17. "Does he still live, or have they assassinated him? If they have killed him, then he has suffered death for Christian truth." But the task he has undertaken, is that to be interrupted? "O God," resumes Dürer, "give us such another man, who, inspired by Thy spirit, will reassemble the fragments of Thy holy church and teach us to lead Christian lives. O God, if Luther is dead, who will hereafter expound Thy holy Gospel for us with his clarity?" Who indeed but the man of whom, a few months before, Dürer had made a crayon sketch of a singular breadth and incisiveness, the master of all knowledge, sacred and profane, whose mediation between Luther and Rome so many Christians were following still with anxiety: "O Erasmus of Rotterdam, with whom shall you throw in your lot? Behold the power of tyranny and injustice in our age, and the power of darkness. Give heed, warrior of Christ; ride boldly at the side of the Lord Christ; defend the truth; win the martyr's crown: are you

[5] Cf. the beautiful edition by Veth and Muller of Dürer's travels: *A. Dürers niederländische Reise*, Berlin-Utrecht, 1918, t. I, *Urkunden*, p. 80, May 17, 1521. The text of the invocation to Erasmus and the sorrow for Luther, truly pathetic, is developed through four large columns (80-82).

not already an aged man? Let your voice be heard: and the gates of Hell, and the throne of Rome, as Christ has said, shall not prevail against you." A poignant cry, for at that very hour Erasmus, feeling outstripped and defeated, and foreseeing moreover a future when culture, in the course of partisan strife, was destined to be attacked from both sides, was writing his melancholy letter to Mountjoy:[6] Is truth, even purest truth, so precious as to make it worth while to pull down the whole universe in preaching it? "It is permitted, it is even good to be silent when no good fruit can come from what is to be revealed. Christ held his peace before Herod."

## II

But Luther was not to be silenced. Neither in the Pope's presence, nor in the presence of kings. Let us try to understand thoroughly his state of mind as he saw the months, at once so empty and so full, slip slowly by at the Wartburg.[7] Let us try to rid our mind of many traditional theories which are always and everywhere being repeated: by-products of an unending controversy whose devotees excel in assuming at will deceiving airs of having a cynical insight based upon long acquaintance with man.

One must picture a high-strung, imaginative man, a be-

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[6] *Opus Epist. Erasmi,* ed. Allen, IV, ep. 1219, p. 544 [ 100 ]: *Et arbitor phas esse tacere quod verum est, si non sit spes fructus.*—Cf. also above [42] this Erasmian declaration: *Si Lutherus omnia vert scripsisset, mihi tamen magnopere displiceret seditiosa liberatas.*

[7] *Ego hic otiosissimus et negotiosissimus sum* (To Spalatin, June 10, 1521; End., III, no. 441, 171).

ing of flame-like impetuosity, who has just lived through such months as Luther lived through from the time of the burning of his writings in accordance with the Papal Bull to the moment of his appearance before the Emperor at Worms. Tormented by scruples but fortified by emotions and convictions which sprang from an inexhaustible fountain within, this man, this ardent Christian had just proclaimed to the world his break with the Church and had consummated it without faltering, if not without inward torment, in the name of the God whom he felt live and speak inside him. He emerges aglow from the struggle. He feels pounding within him the energies stored for the journey to Worms, energies which found only an imperfect outlet at the Diet. And now bruskly he finds himself seized on by fighting men. The circumstances are dramatic. The setting, picturesque and affecting to a degree which his lively imagination had not wholly anticipated. A stronghold; thick walls; a well guarded door closes behind him; other doors are unlocked and locked. Then silence, solitude, peace, sudden inactivity. No one near. The uncertainty not only of the future but even of the present. What is he, hidden in this redoubt, a free man or a prisoner? What are the Elector's real purposes? But Luther hardly stops at this point. To what destiny does God call him? He considers and finds it difficult to discover himself again under this disguise of a knight,[8] with his growing beard, his encumbering sword, disturbed as he is by a

[8] Ut tu me difficile nosses cum ipse me jam dudum non noverim (To Spalatin, May 14, 1521; End., III, no. 435, 155).

wholly unaccustomed régime and unused to the diet of a forest stronghold, abundantly seasoned, no doubt, and including spiced venison.

Then, a physical crisis, a chronic complaint of the stomach and bowels, becomes aggravated. Luther tells all about it in letters to Melanchthon that have often been cited; he writes without euphuisms, with the baldness of the men of his time, who made none of those concessions to modesty with which men of more polished centuries surround their too naïve physiological revelations.[9] Another difficulty grows out of the problem of action: how was he to order a life cut off as his was from external outlets and external relationships? For a time in this void Luther's force is turned in on himself.[10] He hesitates and reproaches himself for his hesitations and at the same time rejoices in them. On chilly mornings he indulges himself a bit, luxuriating in the warmth of his bed. At noon, or at night, he develops incongruous refinements of taste in the matter of certain delicacies that two small pages bring up to him from the kitchen,[11] under orders from Hans von Berlepsch, the indulgent chatelain. And when night advances and he stretches himself on his couch, not having done enough work to be healthily tired, he is haunted by

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[9] Cf. in End., III, p. 149, 171, 189, 199, 204.

[10] *Nunc sum hic otiosus, sicut inter captivos liber* (May 15, 1521; End., III, 150).—*Ego otiosus hic et crapulosus sedeo tota die, Bibliam græcam et hebræam lego* (May 14; *ibid.*, 154).—Compare with the text cited on the preceding page, there also Luther added: *Hebraica et Graeca disco et sine intermissione scribo*—which determines the sense of *otiosus*. Cf. also End., III, 164, May 26: *Cum sim eremita, anachorita, vereque monachus.*

[11] *Tractat me vir loci hujus ultra meritum longe* (End., III, no. 441, p. 171).

regrets and fancies. Unassuaged appetites obsess this resolute individualist, tender impulses; he is lost unless surrounded by other living creatures whose spiritual breath can mingle with his.

In the cold hard silence of the Wartburg, in the utter darkness of these nights which an active imagination peoples with phantoms, how sweet to feel a friendly presence, the living warmth of a human caress: hence the "devouring fires of the unsubjugated flesh," hence the appetites, the sensual desires, the idleness, the love of sleep, all the terrible faults with which Luther reproaches himself in a famous letter, on July 13, 1521, to Melanchthon [12] with a frankness which is only too eagerly self-accusatory; hence the confessions, the "cynical confessions" of Martin Luther, which, to the absurd confusion of too readily saddened Lutherans, fill with triumph the hearts of enemies eager to profit by his too specific sincerity—a sincerity not unalloyed perhaps with complacent remnants of monkish humility and of conscientious excess.

For Luther would not be the thorough German that he

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[12] End., III, 189: "*Displicuerunt mihi literæ tuæ . . . quod me extollis nimio . . . Confundit ac discruciat me tua egregia ista suspicio mei, cum ego hic insensatus et induratus sedeam in otio proh dolor parum orans, nihil gemens pro ecclesia Dei, quin carnis meæ indomitae uror magnis ignibus; summa, qui fervere spiritu deveo, ferveo carne, libidine, pigritia, otio, somnolentia ac nescio an quia vos non oratis pro me, Deus a me aversus sit*" . . . —Cf. also End., III, 193, July 13, 1521, to Melanchthon: *Orate pro me quaeso vos; peccatis enim immergor in hac solitudine.*—End., III, 230, September 9, 1521, to Spalatin: *Adhuc sum stertans et otiosus ad orandum et opponendum ut mihi vehementer displiceam et onerosus sim, forte quod solus sim et vos me non juvetis.*—End., III, 243, Nov. 1, 1521, to Spalatin: *Non tamen sum monachus, assunt enim multi et mali et astuti daemones, qui mihi tempus, quod aiunt, eludunt sed moleste.*"

is if he did not find deep within him a slightly pathological fondness for exposing hidden flaws, a half sensual, half morose impulse to strip them naked in broad daylight, and an eagerness, so to speak, to burrow and probe without shame to the depths of manure piles in his quest of renewed virginity and the liberating experience of a total justification.

Such were the not quite impeccable preoccupations of Luther's long empty days at the Wartburg. It can readily be surmised that they sorted well with the tastes of Luther's companion *par excellence*, that devil whose exploits are set forth at such length in the *Table Talk*. The Adversary, to give him one of his old names. Against him the recluse of the Wartburg waged endless war;[18] but how Luther would have missed him, if he had ceased to incarnate, in opposition to Luther's most exalted aspirations towards purity and divine harmony, that appetite for pleasure, that temptation to blasphemy, that terrible attraction toward sin, all that Luther needed, all of those accessories with which it was necessary to surround himself in order to satisfy his taste for suffering and redemption and for washing innocence white of its stain!

A constant companion, this devil; Luther speaks of him without violence, with a tranquil interest, with something like kindness. Listening to him, one seems to be hearing by anticipation the *Prolog* of the earlier Faust—the Faust of the period when Goethe, lending his voice to

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[18] See preceding footnote, the allusion to the *multi et mali astuti dæmones*.

devils and sorcerers, was nourishing himself with his "heritage of a child of the North" before he had gone to sit down at the table of the Greeks—one seems to be hearing the Master's address to Mephistopheles, that other illustrious incarnation of the German Satan: "I have never hated your kind. Among all the spirits who negate, the spirit of ruse and of malice displeases me least. Man's activity relaxes too often. And I like him to have for a companion one active, restless and capable himself, at need, of creation: the Devil. . . ."

But enough of that. What matters more to us are the actual thoughts of the heretic of Worms when he turned his mind to that piece of drama in which he had just participated and the situation in which the Elector had placed him. When one reads his letters from the Wartburg, in volume III of the Enders edition, when one reads them with a fresh insight without letting one's self be hampered by the unsympathetic commentaries, what a clear insight they afford into the state of mind of a man who, while capable of dexterity—not to say dexterities—in action, was submitting for the time being—and at a time when there were adversaries to be won over and allies to be held—to the galling restraints of a policy of prudent precautions!

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At the first, at the time of arrival, it is clear he was worried. The Pope has expelled him from the Church. The Bull *Decet Romanorum Pontificem*, of April 29, 1521, re-

iterating and confirming the condemnation pronounced in the Bull *Exsurge*, had completed the Papal action.[14] The Emperor had put him outside the protection of the civil law. The edict of Worms, May 26, 1521, made him a public enemy and an outlaw; whoever encountered him might kill him with impunity and expect to be only applauded for the act. No matter. Does not his conscience, the very voice of God, cry out to him: "You are right. Persevere." Meanwhile what secret agonies of anxiety are revealed in that letter written shortly after his abduction—ten days, in fact [15]—in which he informs Spalatin of the enthusiastic reception that Abbé Hersfeld accorded him on his way back from Worms, and how Hersfeld begged him, excommunicated as he was, to stay and preach to the people, or, further, of the splendid recompense for his magnificent courage which the population of Eisenach extended to the hero of the encounter at Worms!

Luther does not plume himself upon these recollections. He is not admiring himself as the champion of Worms. He finds these scenes moving, but this is because they confirm him in the impression that he has really given a fruitful and salutary interpretation of the Word, since so many pious men are testifying to and affirming the beneficial results. But the memory also augments his deep rancor

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[14] It is known that there were three pontifical Bulls indited against Luther: the Bull *Exsurge*; a Bull indited at Rome but not published because of Aleander's representations, which has not been handed down to us; the Bull *Decet Romanum Pontificem* finally, of January 3, 1521, definitively expelling Luther and his partisans from the Church.

[15] End., III, no. 435, p. 154, May 14, 1521.

towards persecutors who in pursuing him are merely betraying their hatred of this salutary Word. At the same time one question especially disturbs his conscience and especially haunts him. This is clear from brief turns of phrase here and there. Did he really fulfil worthily his mission at Worms as a herald of the Word and ambassador of Christ, by whose breath he seemed to be wholly animated and whose presence alone gave him his courage, his unshakable resolution, his faith. Did he not, through too human anxieties, through concessions to politicians, to people of prudence and wordly wisdom, betray the God who entrusted him with this mission; did he not prove inferior to his task and unworthy of the God he served by modifying, to accord with wretched political and social considerations, his affirmation of the Word? Ought he not to have given it a quite different force, a quite different certainty, a contagious quality worthy of the Prophets and of the sovereign majesty of the Holy Ghost? How much it conveys, this passage from a letter to Spalatin, his constant and prudent mediator between human limitations and divine necessities:[16] "I tremble and my conscience is troubled because, yielding to your advice and that of your friends at Worms, I let the spirit within me weaken instead of stiffen in its opposition to these idols of a new Elias. They should hear something different if I should chance to be brought before them again! But enough of the matter."

A sudden and sharp explosion: it throws into high relief

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[16] End., III, 229, Sept. 9, 1521.

the intimate sentiments of the Recluse of the Wartburg. The biographers who relate the life of the Reformer periodically, some piously, some profanely, and some without partisan feeling, though this does not mean without bias, are apt to pass rather lightly over these long weeks, a whole summer, an autumn, a long winter. They block them in with a picture of Luther bravely studying Greek and Hebrew, translating the Bible, composing sermons, letters, treatises. His bed, his flute, and his devil complete the impression. But as for the spirit in which he accepted his retirement—that question is never raised. Or rather the answer is assumed to be self-evident. Having been a party to his own abduction he could not have been other than happy about its consequences. Behind the thick walls of the Wartburg he breathed easy. They wouldn't come after him. He need not fear for his life.

But is it really to be supposed that Luther feared danger, that he lived in a constant apprehension of martyrdom? One grants that he was a man; his letters to Melanchthon establish that point. Fortunately. And the world today is full of men who know from personal and still quite recent experience the intensity with which the creature instinct of man may revolt when he is exposed to the threat of extinction. But by the same token the world is full also of men who know how easily the spirit obtains a mastery over these instinctive tendencies of the organism, or rather how easily its strength suffices to raise man above the earth and carry him off and hurl him in spite of himself into imminent danger of death. As for Luther? He had made his sacri-

fice in going to Worms. But he carried within the secret thirst of the martyr, the image of John Huss at the stake. At least his mind was made up to martyrdom. And when he referred to his trip to Worms in the months that immediately followed, it was never without an indefinable accent of regret. He still lived. He had escaped from Behemoth. God's will be blessed! But had he not really shown too much prudence?

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In fact he had not been eight days at the Wartburg when, on May 12, 1521, in a letter to John Agricola, he wrote these words:[17] "I am a strange sort of captive here. I remain here willingly and unwillingly. Willingly, for God wills it. Unwillingly, because my whole inclination is to be in the field publicly defending the Word. But I have not yet made myself fit!" On the same day he wrote even more definitely to a friend much closer to his heart, to Melanchthon:[18] "Greetings! And you, my Philip, what may you be doing at this moment? Praying for me, I hope, that this retirement which I have accepted in spite of myself may in some way redound to the glory of God. Oh, how impatient I am to learn if you approve of my course! I was

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[17] End., III, 151, May 12, 1521: *Ego mirabilis captivus qui et volens et nolens hic sedeo.*

[18] End., III, 148: *An non pro me oras, ut secessus iste quem invitus admisi operetur aliquid majus in gloriam Dei? . . . Verebar ego ne aciem deserere viderer . . . Nihil magis opto quam furoribus adversariorum occurrere objecto jugulo.*—Six months later in a letter to Gerbel the same sentiments are repeated (End., III, 240): *Ego quidem arbitrabar cervicem esse objectandam publico furori, sed illis aliud visum. . . .*

fearful of appearing to abandon my post; but I saw no way of standing out against their wills and their representations. And yet I desire but one thing: to run with all speed and expose myself to the fury of the enemy!"

It seems then "they" had persuaded him to yield. But so far as he, Luther, was concerned, he would rather have answered that Sickingen had long been offering his knights and his castles, and that he had said no to the King of the Knights. Other arguments had influenced him. In reserving the future, in consenting to play for a time the game the Elector desired, was he not taking the best means of safeguarding his work and (which doubtless affected him more emotionally) of making possible his reunion presently with the little circle of friends at Wittenberg in whose midst he might warm his faithful heart? And so he had yielded. And he was honestly carrying out the agreement. He was keeping the secret of his hiding place fairly well. He was denying his presence at the Wartburg with more or less conviction. But how his retirement, his isolation, his position of a hermit in the middle of a desert seems to weigh on him! He has hardly arrived at his refuge when already he is thinking of leaving it to go down to Erfurt at first, and then to Wittenberg. However he submits himself corporially to direction, he cannot subordinate his mind, his speech, or his conscience. The Elector has no more hold on him than the Pope or the Emperor.

The Elector? A striking fact, and one not enough emphasized, is that never in all Luther's correspondence does

one find a single word of gratitude to him or even of recognition. How frequent, on the other hand, are the violent and even brutal denunciations of petty sovereigns, exactly the type to which Frederick belongs. It is often Frederick's attitude indeed that furnishes the point of departure. In a letter to Spalatin, August 8, the enforced guest manifests a scruple with regard to the expense of his maintenance. Who is paying the bills? Can it be the chatelain, Hans von Berlepsch? Luther hopes not. If it were, he would not live an instant at the expense of this excellent but only moderately circumstanced man. But no doubt the Elector is paying Luther's expenses. Which is as it should be. Luther then, so far from being the recipient of largesse, is merely the occasion of a restitution. His own crude expression is:[19] "If one must spend someone's money it had better be the money of princes. For to be a prince without being in some sense a thief, the thing is impossible, or nearly!" An unexpected point of agreement between the Reformer and that merry and mocking scullion whose hanging Brantôme describes; he too standing at the top of his ladder in the public square protested to the populace that he had never "stolen from poor people but only from the rich and great, greater thieves than we, for they rob us every day; it is only right to reclaim from them what they steal from us."

Anyway, Luther was doing himself full justice when he

[19] End., III, 219: *Principem esse et non aliqua parte latronem esse, aut non aut vix possible est; coque majorem quo major Princeps fuerit.*

confided to Spalatin in another letter:[20] "I have a natural horror of courts." The confession could not have come as a surprise to His Grace's almoner.

No, Luther neither felt, nor believed himself to be, under any obligation to the Elector while he was at the Wartburg. He was more disposed to imagine he was doing a favor. In order not to create embarrassment he had consented to physical retirement. But he had no idea of ever renouncing one iota of his freedom of thought or of private judgment. A thousand times no. What a furious explosion, for instance, on one occasion when Spalatin had transmitted an imperative order from the Elector! "First of all," cries Luther,[21] "I will not endure your informing me that 'the prince will not tolerate attacks on that man of Mainz (i. e. Albert of Brandenburg) or acts dangerous to the political peace.' I would rather lose you, both you and the Prince himself, and everybody. Shall I who defied the Pope, the creator of the Bishop of Mainz, now defer to his creature? Golden words, these: one must keep the public peace; but will you suffer him to trouble the eternal peace of God by his impious and sacrilegious works of perdition? No, Spalatin. No, Frederick. For the sake of Christ's flock we must engage this devouring wolf with our whole strength." And a little later, writing to Capiton, then

[20] End., III, 327, April 12, 1522: *Ego natura mea ab aula abhorreo.* Brantôme's text is in the *Dames*, ed. Bouchot (Jouaust), 5th Discourse II, 88.

[21] End., III, no. 465, p. 246, Nov. 11, 1521: *Primum non feram quod ais, non passurum Principem scribi in Moguntinum . . . Potius te et Principem ipsum perdam et omnem creaturam! . . . Non sic, Spalatine; non sic, Princeps! sed pro ovibus Christi resistendum est summis viribus lupo isti gravissimo, ad exemplum aliorum!*

secretary to Albert himself: "You ask gentleness and tact. I understand you. But is there any standard of measure that a Christian and a hypocrite would both regard? . . . It is my opinion that a man must take exception to everything, censure everything, take account of nothing, admit no excuses, until truth shall triumph in the market place, free, pure, and naked!" No, the idealist of 1520 has not changed in spirit or sentiment during his confinement at Wartburg.

III

And yet, from the very beginning of his confinement, Luther followed with anxious absorption the train of events in his beloved Wittenberg. He retained in his heart the most active interest in the little flock which he regarded as his particular charge. And if, from this time forth he narrowed his purview to include only Germany and the affairs of Germany,—did he not write in a letter to Gerbel on November 1, 1521, these significant words: "I was born for my fellow Germans; it is they I would serve, *Germanis meis natus sum, quibus et serviam?*—it was the Wittenbergers in particular who enjoyed his especial solicitude and affection.

Not that he has the vulgar egotism to suppose that without him all is lost. He knows, to be sure, that he is a good interpreter of the Gospel, and for this he gives credit to God. But a very touching series of letters exists, all dating from the months at the Wartburg, in which he attempts with a delicacy of feeling and expression which is very

rare in that brutal age, to inspire his Philip with a self-confidence which the latter's natural modesty and his tendency as a scholar to recoil from vulgar contacts with the world have prevented, as Luther believes, from developing adequately. "If I were to perish, the Gospel would not suffer," he writes to his disciple on May 26, 1521.[22] "You even now excel me. You are Elisha, fortified with Elijah's mantle." Further on: "It is you who succeed me at my post, you already richer than I in God's gifts and graces." Or again: "You wander without a shepherd? Ah, what a sadness, what cruel pain in the words. But so long as you, so long as Almsdorf and the others are there, you do not lack a shepherd! Do not speak in this way. Do not offend God thus! Do not show this ingratitude towards Him!" And when in October Wittenberg was threatened with a plague: "I implore you," he immediately writes to Spalatin, "to send Philip away if the plague comes. Such a man as that must be saved and the Word that God has confided to him for the salvation of souls must not perish!"

No, this Luther who is tireless in urging and exhorting Melanchthon is neither a timid and saintly recluse nor a politician who, in fear of losing his ascendancy, asks himself every morning: "Is there not someone close to me who is acquiring too much influence?" The picture he presents is much more curious, that of an impenitent idealist at grips with crude realities, men's caprices, men's passions, men's wills.

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[22] End., III, no. 461, p. 240. The phrase follows a list of works that Luther has just composed: "all in German," he explains, "*omnia vernacula.*"

With close interest, the closest possible, from the time of his Thuringian sojourn in the sylvan stronghold, Luther follows the great work that is going on in men's minds. Bold ideas, flung to the wind by innovators; premature or ill-calculated moves; impatience, anger, mob violence—all this he observes, weighs, broods upon, without impatience or timidity, without craven fear, with all sincerity and largeness of view. This keeps him, moreover, very busy. Events move fast in the summer and autumn months of 1521. Everywhere unrest, uproar, outbreaks, violent ill-considered utterances, seditious tumult. Roused by hundreds of pamphlets and deeply stirred by appeals from renegade priests and monks, the populace in various quarters seemed ripe for a violent revolution against the clergy. In Erfurt the houses of ecclesiastics were broken into, looted and sacked. The precedent was followed. Everywhere such incidents multiplied. Peaceful folk took fright and talked of repressive measures and of making necessary examples. Luther brought his opposition to bear. "No," he protested,[23] "the Gospel is not compromised if a few of our party are preaching against moderation. And those who have been thus diverted from the Word are folk who have no true respect for the Word anyway. To hiss a preacher of impiety is less of a sin than to accept his doctrine without objection." He had earlier written: "Should we alone be compelled to keep dogs from yelping?"

[23] End., III, no. 465, to Spalatin, Nov. 11, 1521, p. 247: *Soli nos sumus, ex quibus exigitur ne canis mutiat*—Cf. also, in letter no. 455 to Spalatin, Sept. 9, 1521, an apology for the violence against Erasmus: *illorum scripta, quia abstinent ab increpando, mordendo, offendendo, simul nihil promovent* (p.229).

It is none the less true that more and more, through circumstances beyond Luther's control, one great question was imposing itself upon theorists; at least practical developments were imposing it. Was it legitimate to use violent means to achieve a reform, to bring force to bear for the triumph of Christ over the Roman Antichrist? In the cities hundreds of Lutherans were rendering an affirmative answer by their actions. Luther's answer was, No. But would he long be able to maintain his position?

Other problems too were arising, no less pressing and equally difficult to resolve. In May, 1521, a disciple of Luther's, Bernhardi, identified with the theses of 1518, a priest and the curate of Kempen, set the example of contracting a regular marriage. Celibacy of the priesthood not being of divine institution, Luther saw no objection on the doctrinal side. Practically, however, he found the event embarrassing, disturbing, an occasion for going softly. There was, however, a widespread tendency toward revolt in the monasteries. Monks everywhere, and especially Augustinians, were leaving the cloisters and reverting to laymen. And these too demanded the right to marry. Could they, having taken the oath of chastity of their own free will, violate that oath? Could they do this without committing what Luther called in 1518 the most serious sacrilege?

There was one who affirmed that they could, a man well known to Luther: Carlstadt, the ex-champion of Leipzig, long a canon of Wittenberg, a professor at the university and archdeacon of the Cathedral. Denounced by name as a heretic in the Bull *Exsurge*, this self-willed,

passionate, and quarrelsome man had gone to Denmark in May, 1521, where King Christian II was meditating a reform. He was expelled almost instantly and returned to Wittenberg in June to fling himself into the thick of the battle. The question of celibacy at once attracted him. Before settling it practically for himself—he married on December 26, 1521—he undertook to settle it doctrinally for others. With the aid of a battery of texts and citations from Scripture he established his thesis, then trumpeted forth his opinions; they awoke a considerable echo.

But what was Luther's pronouncement? His attitude was most curious. At first he hesitated. He dodged the issue. May monks marry? But if they have pronounced vows of chastity, they have done so freely, of their own volition and choice. How then are they to become released from their oaths. The difficulty seemed insurmountable. But Carlstadt continued his campaign and Luther his meditations. He still hesitated. He had scruples. As late as August 6, 1521, he wrote to Spalatin[24] these amusing words: "By Heaven, our good people of Wittenberg will give wives even to monks! But to me at least, never!" But his mind was still busy. The idea was implanted. It possessed him and preoccupied him. Till suddenly he sent off a letter to Melanchthon,[25] September 9, 1521. He has found his verdict. Carlstadt's arguments? Defective. His viewpoint? Ill chosen. The truth was that the vows in question had been made in a spirit of vainglory, since the monks in

[24] End., III, 215: *At mihi non obtrudent uxorem!*
[25] End., III, no. 454, p. 222-227.

pronouncing them had counted on them as a means of acquiring sanctity and hence beatitude in the hereafter. Such vows are bad, vicious and, rightly considered, invalid.

At first, hesitation, an instinctive recoil from the revolutionary novelty of solutions proposed in the school of life by a Carlstadt. Then, the slow work of accommodation and reflection. An idea foreign to Luther must be transmuted into his substance so that it can really spring from the depths of the Reformer's consciousness. When that has been done, when Luther has really taken possession of thoughts which have been, as it were, handed to him by another, when he has made them his own in every sense of the term, then a sudden explosion ensues, one of those quick bounds of which we spoke earlier. And lo! the timid, hesitant, indecisive fellow has exceeded in sheer audacity those who were egging him on. And that, at this phase, epitomizes Luther's story.

It was thus with the subject of monks marrying. It was thus with the controversy over participation by the laity in the sacramental wine and over the mass. There again Carlstadt raised the issue with the aid of an eloquent Augustinian, Zwilling. Again Luther hesitated, temporized, turned this way and that; then all of a sudden made up his mind—when he had found the connection, the organic tie between his own conceptions and ideas that at first appeared foreign to him. The line of effort was similar in each case, and is worth observing. Effort, indeed, is too strong a word, for this need for consistency and emotional unity is instinctive with Luther; his propensity is to draw

upon his own experience only, never to be influenced by logic merely, whether false or true, but to work out the solutions slowly in the inner sanctuary of his faith. The fight raged in the cities and around the altars of churches, where rough men and curious women, insatiably bent on such innovations as smack of abomination or scandal, jostled one another, drank the consecrated wine from the very chalice, or, without having fasted, or even without having confessed on the previous day, partook of a wafer as it passed from hand to hand; but Luther, impelled by circumstances to clarify his ideas about ritual and the sacramental observances, remained above feuds and ructions, faithful to his unswerving and fervent idealism, confirmed in his absolute trust in God, as full as ever of hope and of patient confidence; he preserved his broad tolerance, his indestructible opposition to any constraint.

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No. No authority. No violence either, or more accurately, no blows. The populace was in turmoil. Impetuous young folk rioted in the streets. They attacked priests or looted a number of houses or insulted some monks. That was no occasion, surely, for pretending to be shocked or for putting on Pharisaical airs. Yet the principle of such demonstrations is bad. Let the Word alone do its perfect work.[26] Might it not be Satan himself who inspired this mis-

[26] W., VIII, p. 678: *Nemlich das durch das Wort Christi wilchs ist der Geyst, Stang und Schwerd seynes Mundisz, wirt seyne Buberey, Trigerey, Schalckeyt, Tyranney, Vorfurerey ausdeckt und fur aller welt blosz tzu schauden werden. . . .*

directed zeal of the agitators in order to bring discredit upon the true Gospel. "As for me," cried Luther (December, 1521),[27] "I fought with the Pope, the bishops, priests, monks, with my mouth alone, without any sword." While confined at the Wartburg he had not changed on that point either; but already the world around him was changing; Germany and his disciples, these were changing fast.

To him the facts were indifferent. Once he had worked out his views on lay participation in the wine or on the private mass, it did not concern him whether the faithful received the cup or merely the wafer, whether priests performed private masses or not. He had rid himself of the fetish of uniformity. If two communities are agreed on essentials and possess the same living conception of faith, dissimilarities in the ritual are of no importance; they may even be praiseworthy. But all this was unintelligible to his contemporaries, his compatriots, his disciples. They did not repudiate his notion of a wholly spiritual church, but it no longer satisfied them. In opposition to the secular church whose sacraments, hierarchy, and laws they rejected, they were impatient to erect another church purified of all the abuses which they had denounced without stint, a church with its own special ritual and laws. This, then, was the first cross purpose, and one that a Carlstadt and a Zwilling did not hesitate to exploit.

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[27] *Der Mund Christi musz es thun . . . Hab ich nit dem Bapst, Bischoffen, Pfaffen und Munchen alleyn mit dem Mund, on allen Schwerd schlag, mehr abbrochen denn yhm biszher alle Keyszer unnd Konige unnd Fursten mit alle yhr Gewalt haben abbrochen?* (W., VIII, 683).

It was not the only one or the most serious one. Many understood but very imperfectly Luther's exhortations to patience and his counsels of abstinence and disinterestedness, and showed themselves little inclined to give heed to them. Would not the Word operate more quickly if bold and resolute men brought their strength to bear? So they thought and said. They went further and acted on the idea. And Luther became alarmed and multiplied his appeals for moderation. But would he long be able to preserve this attitude of passivity? In that work called the *Treue Vermahnung*, composed in December, 1521, on his return from his secret visit to Wurttemberg, one surprising sentence occurred. A recantation? Surely not; for even in the *Manifesto to the German Nobility* Luther said things not greatly different. "No revolt. Mr. Everyone, *Herr Omnes*, has only one right: to keep still." *Herr Omnes*—but what of his masters, the princes?

Ah, as for them, if they were to act, if they were themselves to realize the work of reform that many Germans are secretly taking it upon themselves to promote, that would not be sedition, culpable violence, a revolt against the will of God. What the proper authorities achieve bears no taint of sedition. Yes, to rid Germany of Popery, to sweep the soil clear of the encumbering ruins of a church whose dangers and abuses Luther had denounced—for this end "the secular power and the nobles should exert their regular authority, each prince and each overlord in his own domain." Summing up his thought, Luther

cried:[82] "Respect the authorities. So long as they undertake nothing and give no command, set a watch on your hand, your tongue, your heart . . . But if you can influence them to act and give orders, it is permitted you to do so . . ."

Let us not too hastily accuse him of inconsistency. When Luther wrote these lines he still reserved liberty of conscience. He conceded to the princes only the domain of outward manifestations of thought and religious activity. So at least he could say and believe. But what possibilities of later concessions and modifications lurk in the following vague, modest, obscure and tentative sentence: "The secular power and the nobles should exert their regular authority, each prince and each overlord in his own domain." In the background of Luther's mind, at the very moment when the reformer is thundering: No visible church; no tariff on thought; no human persuasion except preaching the Word and meditation thereon!—in the background of Luther's mind the paradoxical spectre of spiritual provincialism may already be clearly discerned.

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Always up to this time and so long as he remained at the Wartburg, Luther had been able to maintain his position. Much more, he had derived from his first contact with men the means to broaden and consolidate it. He had

[82] W., VIII, 680: *Darumb hab acht auff die Ubirkeyt, so lange die nit tzu grefft und befilhet, szo haldt du Stille mit Hand, Mund unnd Hertz, und nym dich nichts an; Kanstu aber die Ubirkeyt bewegen, das sie angreyffe und befelhe, szo magistu es thun.*

managed thus far to fit into what theologians call his system—the coherent and, so to speak, organic body of sentiments and subjective truths whose harmony with his inner nature became every day more apparent to him—he had been able to fit into this system ideas, criticisms, innovations which others, in Luther's opinion, were presenting badly and supporting with bad arguments, i. e., arguments which were anti- or extra-Lutheran.

Thus his idealism was still in the ascendant. He had not barricaded himself behind a hard wall or behind any artificial barrier. There did not yet exist for Luther any stronghold, or place of safety, or donjon keep such as that within which, exhausted with the battles of his youth, as an old disillusioned man he would one day seclude himself to defy the universe and to scoff at the vain disturbances which broke like inconsequential ripples at the foot of his walls. True enough. And it is even necessary to know the future of Luther and of Lutheranism in order to discern at this point, in the midst of this passionate effort at assimilation, the germ of weakness and dissolution which was to destroy the whole.

What sprang from the ardent soul of this great visionary, this great religious lyricist, was a poem. It was not a plan of action.

# PART THREE

## THE RECOIL

# CHAPTER IX

## THE CRISIS: 1521-1525

THE traditional history of Martin Luther had one great merit—its simplicity. It was not encumbered with subtleties. Luther had become hardened to abuse. Isolated at the Wartburg he had lost the direction of the movement. Fanatics had thrown all into confusion, so much so that, in order to keep his vessel afloat, Luther had been forced to steer a somewhat irregular course.

"Contradiction" is the word used by friendly critics; his enemies said he was "lying." A harsh word, the latter, one not in the vocabulary of historians. But the former also is a word which is less than pleasant, not to be applied without the modification of one or two preliminary observations.

"We do not construct forms without selection and arrangement," wrote André Gide recently, relating personal recollections. "But the most troublesome problem arises from the necessity of describing as successive states that interweave or are simultaneous." An astute observation. How often do we historians neglect this lesson, as if there were nothing of artifice in this "strictly objective" chronology of which we are so proud, when having given

numerical sequence to Luther's intellectual discoveries, we call them out one after the other, systematically, like a good cashier behind his wicket. "I am a creature of dialogue," insists André Gide. "Everything in me disputes and contradicts." It is no surprise to find a similar sentiment expressed in the *Table Talk*. At the most we would be tempted, with Nietzsche, to protest against the word "*dialog*" and remark with him: "A German"—let us say, Martin Luther—"who would dare to exclaim, 'I harbor, alas, two souls within my being!' would be royally deceived in the number of his souls." Luther and Faust are contemporaries. Let us remember before we exclaim "Contradiction!" that we must be certain that we are not regarding as new ideas whose earlier manifestations have chanced to escape our attention.

In the second place,—but this follows naturally,—we should not think of the Reformer as sharing the fate of the architect who is forced to alter his plans to suit the whim of his clients. The history of Luther's relations with his contemporaries will naturally appear a little more complicated to us than to our fathers. To make of Luther a man who, confronted with opposition, immediately sloughs off his personality as a serpent its skin, and, at the cost of a sweeping disavowal, regains his ascendency over the masses, is to belittle at the same time both Luther and his contemporaries. He was not capable of doubling with such careless abruptness, nor they of following him with such docility. Between him and them, there were many mutual

exchanges, actions and reactions. The following notes will make this clear.

I

Impatient under the handicap of his isolation, and eager to learn more of events than his too brief letters conveyed, Luther stole away from the Wartburg and made a secret visit to Wittenberg between the fourth and ninth of December, 1521.[1] He reimbued all with confidence and hope, and then reascended to the cloud country and his castle of the birds. His soul at peace, his spirit again serene, he announced his determination to reside there again until Easter. But three months had not elapsed when suddenly, the first of March, 1522, he again left his retreat. Garbed in his Junker costume, as appears from the testimony of two young Swiss who saw him one night at the Black Bear in Jena, he made all speed to his beloved Wittenberg. He was not to return to the Wartburg.

While he was traveling, on the fifth of March, he sent from Borna, near Leipzig, a famous letter to the Elector of Saxony.[2] A long, but pithy communication, essential to the understanding of a Luther—terse, imperious, proud, marvelous in the freedom and ease of its sure strokes, with something at the same time tender, benevolent and exalted —in short a heroic utterance. One of those rare documents that four centuries have not succeeded in tarnishing. In it

[1] End., III, 252, to Spalatin: *Wittembergae, apud Philippum meum, in aedibus Amsdorffanis.*

[2] Cited in End., III, no. 485, p. 296; German text in E., LIII, no. 40, p. 104, and De Wette, II, 362, p. 137 *sq.*

anyone can see plainly how Luther felt in his soul when, in that trying spring of 1522, he came posting down to the troubled cities and the rumor-ridden countryside.

First, briefly, he reminded the prince that when he went to the Wartburg, it had been in his, the Elector's, interests. "I made a great concession to Your Highness in secluding myself for a year. The Devil knows it was not from fear I did it! He saw into my heart when I went to Worms and knows that if I had thought there were more demons there than tiles on the roofs I would even so have thrown myself eagerly into their midst." Always the same regret, the same uneasiness, this looking back upon a past which, heroic as it was, left Luther disappointed, troubled, a prey to uneasiness. And now when he was renouncing the shelter that Frederick had contrived, his first thought was still for the Elector. Would he suppose that Luther, by his sudden decision, was planning to compromise him, force him to modify his tactics, to declare that he would not enforce the edict of Worms? It was necessary to repel this possible suspicion; the fugitive from the Wartburg set about it with energy. "By no means is it my intention to solicit your protection . . . No matter whether or not I knew that Your Grace had the power and the intention to protect me I would come to Wittenberg." In a word, he placed himself "under a much higher protection than that of an Elector";[8] and since God watched over all he had no

[8] *Ich Kome gen Wittemberg in gar viel cinem böhern Schutz, denn des Kurfürsten. Ich habs auch nicht im Sinn von E. K. F. G. Schutz begehren. Ja, ich halt, ich wolle E. K. F. G. mehr schützen denn sie mich schützen Könnte.*

need of human intervention. "Here he who has the greatest faith can give the greatest protection. But since, in my opinion, Your Grace is still very feeble in the faith I cannot believe you to be the man capable of defending and liberating me." [4] Frederick had nothing to do but let events take their natural course. And Luther firmly outlined for him his duty: "This is how Your Grace should comport himself before men: bow to authority as becomes a Prince Elector. Let His Imperial Majesty rule over your cities and countryside, persons and chattels, in compliance with the laws of the Empire. Do not resist, do not oppose, do not place the slightest obstacle in the way of authority if it wishes to seize me or put me to death. For no one can break or flout authority, no one but He who established it." And Luther concluded: "If they come to seek me, or if they have me sought out, events will shape themselves without worry, inconvenience or demands of any sort upon Your Grace. For Christ has not taught me to be a Christian to the risk and peril of others." [5]

Those are words both noble and sincere. It was not an imaginary danger that Luther was braving. Frederick knew it, and on the eve of Luther's departure,[6] advised him to remain in the Wartburg, or at least to await the outcome of the Diet of Nuremberg, announced for March, 1522, in

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[4] *Gott muss hie allein schallen, ohn alles menschlich Sorgen und Zuthün . . . Darumb, wer am meisten glaübt, der wird hie am meisten schützen.*

[5] *Denn Christus hat mich nicht gelehrt mit eines andern Schaden ein Christ seyn.*

[6] End., III, no. 484, p. 292: *Instruction des Kurfürsten Friedrich für J. Oswalk, Amtmann in Eisenach* (Lochau, last of February, 1522).

the course of which many ugly threats would be directed both against the priest and against his noble protector. These were brave and hardy words, therefore, which Luther uttered from the depths of his heart. And, coming as they did on the very eve of his return to the conflict, how well they display his character!

To risk life, to go forth alone, unarmed except with dreams, to advance under fire, to stand so far in the forefront of the fighting that even at the moment of the first instinctive recoil, produced by the sudden shock of imminent danger, retreat is already out of the question and one simple, inevitable outcome appears to be indicated, namely, death: these are things that millions and millions have done and are capable of doing. With a clear sense of what he was and what he could do, Martin Luther, like them, was offering himself as a martyr—like them, who were only disciples, servants of the ideal, not creators.

* * *

But what stringent necessity impelled the Reformer, in March, 1522, to disregard the wishes of the Elector Frederick and return in such haste to Wittenberg?

Since May, 1520, there had been disturbances in Zwickau, a little town in Saxony, to the north of the Erzgebirge and the Hussite country. A fanatical priest, Thomas Münzer, with the help of the craftsmen, especially the clothiers, had attempted to establish there a "kingdom of Christ," a kingdom without a king, without a magistrate, without ecclesiastical or temporal authority, without any law, any

church, any cult; the free subjects of which, relying only on the Scriptures, were supposed to experience the blessings of communism whose utopian glamour has a special power over simple minds. The Zwickau magistrate took fright and adopted harsh measures. Münzer fled. His lieutenants followed his example. And on December 27, 1521, the three of them, Nicholas Storch the fuller, Thomas Drechsel and Marcus Thomæ, took refuge, says Strübner, at Wittenberg. This was three weeks after Luther had returned to the Wartburg from his first trip to Wittenberg.

As soon as they were settled in the town the three apostles began to fulfil their mission as men of God, especially favored with grace and direct revelations. Soon the strangeness of their doctrines, their fanatical assurance, their mingled respect and scorn for Luther, a timorous reformer useful only as affording the true prophets a springboard of a reasoned doctrine for their leap into the absolute, their diatribes against knowledge as tending to produce inequalities, their advocacy of manual labor, their incitements to image-breaking, since the images tended to foster in the depths of the people's souls the leaven of old beliefs and superstitions, inherited and handed down by women, healers and visionaries, of whom we shall never know anything exact, although we can scarcely exaggerate their hold upon the people of this period —all this served the fugitives from Zwickau, the "Cygnæan prophets," to gain in a few weeks an alarming hold on the Wittenberg citizens. Among the first to hear and

be suddenly fired with the new grace was Carlstadt; the adhesion of such a scholar and, in the modern phrase, such a typical specimen of the intelligentsia, was immensely valuable to these untutored illuminati.

The prophets soon proceeded to action. Rushing upon the churches they pillaged them brutally. Was it not written: "Thou shalt not make unto thyself any graven images?" The disease spread. Nobody attempted to oppose Storch and his acolytes. Melanchthon did not know what to do. The perfect assurance of the newcomers baffled this timid fellow, always fearful of letting the spirit of God pass by on the other side without his recognizing it in time to extend his greeting. So he turned to Luther, who alone, in this chaos, was capable of putting things and people in their proper places. He alone, with his lucidity of a true prophet.

* * *

Luther did not even hesitate, but set out at once. For fear of being superseded, supplanted in the favor of the people by rivals, by enemies? What nonsense! It was merely that Luther believed it his duty to appear at once wherever Melanchthon and the Christian flock of which he had charge should summon him. Because, too, a convicton actuated him: these prophets were certainly not of God; therefore they must be of the devil—at least Satan was using them in his battle with truth; so he must expose and unmask them. Because, finally, there were many who advocated harsh measures against these men whom the mag-

istrates of Zwickau had already prosecuted, and this Luther could not endure. That was his first care: no bloodshed, no tortures! On January 17, 1522, he wrote to Spalatin:[7] "I should not like to have them imprisoned, especially by those who are asking it of us. Without spilling blood or drawing the sword, let it not be doubted that we shall gently extinguish these two firebrands. For your part, guard carefully against our Prince's soiling his hands with the blood of these new prophets!" His faith in the Word inspired these lines. For, had not God actually made *him* the herald and interpreter of this Word? Was it not a strict obligation on him to impose it as an obstruction to Satan's nefarious enterprises? What mattered the expediencies of the Elector, his wish to placate the Emperor, his political forethought? On March 6, Luther arrived at Wittenberg. The day before, from Borna, he had written his famous letter to Frederick. Three days later, on Sunday the ninth, he entered the pulpit. He preached on eight successive days.

For eight days he preached, with simplicity, force, perfect clarity, a singular moderation withal, and a surpassing sense of values and of justice. Men, women, savants and common people, all could feast freely, fully, and eagerly, and could commune with a spirit formed to charm and to dominate. In Luther they again found the hero type, *their* hero in fact. He was built in the physical mould of a hero and leader, with a trace of the common people, a firm

[7] End., III, no. 480, p. 286.

stance, a deep chest that resounded under the blows of his fists. But his eyes, deepset beneath a prominent overhanging forehead, gleamed with strange darting flames, and his speech pulsated with those quickening vibrations by which, through the centuries, the bells pealing high in their belfries have aroused men to action.

So, in one week, all hearts were recaptured; even the most violent were calmed by this self-assured force. He had proved his claim: the Word as he preached it was sovereign. And then, since others elsewhere were upset and were straying from the fold, he departed. People saw him, listened to him, came under his spell in Altenburg, Borna, in Zwickau itself, and in Erfurt also, and Weimar. Everywhere the same success—crowds completely dominated by the masterful display of moderation and force. The splendid idealism that animated Luther impressed all as something unique in its power to conquer and rule. Each journey meant a victory.

II

On the morrow, however, it was all to be done again. To win a crowd and to sway it exactly as one wished was child's play for an orator in full possession of his powers. But there were the little parties and coteries, by whatever name they chose to call themselves, with their slow, insidious, irresistible influence.

No sooner was Luther away than enemies attacked him for his mildness, his halfway measures; in the natural course it would soon be his *treason*. And the tragic element

in the situation was that Luther himself, his example, his own revolt, furnished these men, who disputed with him his leadership, ammunition against him; by overthrowing him they declared they would mount to a higher plane. Mystical individualists, eager solely to plunge and lave their souls in the abysses of the invisible and enjoy in the depths of their consciousnesses, without benefit of the Church, or of creeds or preceptors, the morbid intoxication of this solitary gratification; fanatical Anabaptists in quest of a kingdom of God embracing only the elect, men fired with the Holy Spirit, and entitled to revel with perfect equality in the delights of an unrestricted communism—they all seemed to say, holding out to Luther a mirror stamped with their own reflection: "Behold! This is you—you with all your self-assurance. How can you blame us? What we are saying you have said before us, except that, more logical and more courageous too, we proceed to the logical conclusion. You sit faint-hearted by the side of the road and shrug your shoulders as you watch us pass." This was specious reasoning. Luther soon had an opportunity to estimate its success.

On August 24, 1522, when he went to Orlamünde, a domain of Carlstadt, to refute his old associate, the people gathered ominously in front of the house of the alderman who had received him, and later around his carriage, hurling insults. "Go to all the devils," they shouted, "and may you break your neck before you leave!" At the same time several artisans, a shoemaker especially, impromptu controversialists, baited him with absurd citations. The

scene had a most violent effect on Luther, more especially as several days before, at Jena, he had joined issue with Carlstadt himself, and the contest had been sharp. As Luther had been preaching against what he called "the spirit of Allstädt," the seditious and violent spirit of the image breakers and vandals, the acrid Carlstadt, not without some bravado, had come to the Black Bear to confront his adversary. It was a strange scene, ending in a challenge, a challenge which the two theologians—Carlstadt stiff and hostile, Luther affecting an ironical composure that his words belied—exchanged in due form before the witnesses. Luther drew a florin from his purse and handed it to his adversary. The latter, showing it to the bystanders, said: "My dear brethren, this is called Arrogo. It signifies that I have the right to write against Dr. Luther. You are all my witnesses!" And depositing in his purse the coin wrapped in a piece of paper, he touched Luther's hand. The latter drank a draught to his health. Carlstadt pledged him in return. They exchanged several words of mock politeness, then with a last handclasp went their separate ways.[8]

* * *

A man of action, a reformer, the Luther of tradition in short, would at this point, confronted by such resistance,

[8] Details reported by a friend of Carlstadt's, the preacher Reinhardt of Jena, in the account known as *Acta Jenensia* (W., XV, p. 323): he describes the Jena interview and the visit to Orlamünde. For the symbolism of the scene of the florin read W., XV, p. 339, note 3; for Luther's opinion of Reinhardt and his description, cf. Enders, V, no. 835, p. 39 (to Amsdorf, Oct. 27, 1524).

have collected his thoughts, revolved all the aspects of the problem in his luminous mind, would have made his choice, determined his position, and acted. It was late without doubt, but not too late to play the game.

On one side there was a strong group of Catholic princes, who were threatening Luther, persecuting his followers and ferreting out his writings. They were swayed by their devotion to tradition. Also by a dread of the troubles they feared were about to burst upon them. The princes were not alone in this fear. Influential burghers in the cities, literate men too, who had supported Luther when he was in agreement with their Erasmus, such men as Willibald Pirkheimer, the Nuremberg patrician, friend of Albrecht Dürer, when they saw the storm gather, experienced fatigue, disillusion, alarm, and made an instant retreat.

On the other side were the extremists, who accused Luther of not following his ideas to their logical conclusions. And what fault did they find precisely? He retained too many, far too many, of the rites, practices and sacraments of Catholicism; also he refrained from seeking like them and with them to establish the kingdom of Christ on earth; he approved of the divine right of princes; in brief he was lukewarm about the political and social revolution whose dawn they were already joyfully hailing.

Between the two was the little army of the faithful. They trusted Luther but yet were uneasy and felt, many of them, that their leader was making them mark time too long. When Luther spoke, they of course fell completely under his spell. They let themselves be lulled and

intoxicated by his beautiful and honest optimism, by the generosity of a heart overflowing with love. And then, when he stopped speaking, they again withdrew into the shadow, in silence. Why all this hesitation in building an entirely new Church to replace the old one they had quit at his bidding—a great shining, spacious, modern affair, his Church, their Church, with a beautiful, smooth-running organization, a well ordered ritual, with well defined dogmas and uniform liturgy?

In truth the game could play itself. A man of action would have played it. How? According to his own temperament. There were many solutions. One could burn all the bridges, erect as a bulwark a church firmly grounded in good German soil, a haven for everybody, a perfect protection against reactions and revolutions. Or one might, on the other hand, put one's self at the head of the movement and smash the extremists by using them for shock troops; one might ride the crest of a powerful wave which would sweep all away and would leave to the victor a land swept free and with plenty of elbow room in which to pursue the business of reconstruction. A chance for a man of action, one who courts exposure. But Luther—? Luther did not even see that there was a need for action.

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Let us dismiss explanations that do not explain. Doubtless Luther belonged, by virtue of his origin, to the petty bourgeoisie and held narrow views. His long monastic retirement had made him introspective, unlike those politicians and jurists against whom he fostered an instinctive

dislike. He knew nothing of the world about him, of political, economic and social problems. When he pretended in the *Manifesto to the Nobility* to offer solutions to certain questions, he made it quite plain, almost stated in so many words, that he knew nothing of them. In fact, now in 1524 as in 1520, these questions, as far as he was concerned, were non-existent.

Luther was a herald of the Word. To spread this Word, as the Lord had shown it to him and commanded him to publish it, was his mission on earth, his true and only mission. But, he thought, the Word has nothing whatever to do with the problems of the age. The Gospel is not concerned with temporal affairs, or with knowing whether justice reigns on this earth or what should be done to make it reign. To suffer rather, to toil, to resign one's self to injustice, and to carry the cross is to be a Christian; such is his lot on earth, and he should accept it with a humble heart, or he is not a good Christian.

We must not expect, then, to find in Luther the impulse to bring justice into earthly affairs; it was no more to be expected of the Luther of 1523 than of the earlier Luther of the great writings of 1520. He was living in the world, certainly, like any other man. He was a German, thrust into a German society, subject to mundane laws, affected by numerous institutions. As such he could have his ideas, true or false, on the statecraft of princes, the condition of the peasants or the activities of the bankers. He had them —of a sort, in fact, to strike consternation, now and then, to the heart of one reading the *Table Talk*. But that is of

small moment. Martin Luther was not concerned with the kingdom of the earth. He reposed his faith in the blood of Christ; he cared for nothing else. As for building a Lutheran Church with strictly defined dogmas and regularly ordained rites and ceremonies, Luther had not changed in 1523 and 1524 on that point either. A Lutheran Church? How often, at this time, did he protest against the thing itself and even the name! "You do not believe in Luther but in Christ alone. Leave Luther out of it, whether he be scoundrel or saint.[9] I have never known Luther, nor do I wish to know him. What I am preaching is not him, but Christ. The devil take Luther, if he can: we need only Christ and his peace!" He went on persistently pointing out the dangers of uniformity. "It does not seem to me prudent to call a Council and establish a common ritual. One Church need not ape another in these external matters: why should it be hampered by the decrees of a council which soon become laws and fetters upon our souls?" Churches should be free to copy each other or to please themselves in their practices, as long as spiritual unity is preserved, "the unity of Faith and the Word." [10]

It was even useless to try to obtain from Luther rulings on the use of images, on lay participation in both sacraments, on confession—burning questions all, and fruitful of endless division. To those who insisted upon his opinion

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[9] *Denn Luther, lassen sie fahren, er sei ein Bub oder heilig*: Luther to Hartmuth von Kronberg, a friend of Sickingen, March, 1522; End., III, no. 494, p. 308 for the notes; text in E., LIII, no. 45, p. 119 (passage quoted, p. 127) and in De Wette, II, 161 (p. 168).

[10] End., IV, 52-53; Luther to Hausmann, Nov. 17, 1524.

he replied in only one word: "Trifles, irrelevant details." He says distinctly in his letter of December 15, 1524, to the Christians of Strassburg that the great mistake, or rather one of the mistakes, of Carlstadt was encouraging people to think that Christianity consisted essentially in breaking images, abolishing sacraments, condemning baptism. Smoke and vapor, exclaimed Luther, *Rauch und Dampf*! And elsewhere: "Paul says (I Cor., VIII, 4): 'We know that an idol is nothing in the world.' If idols are nothing, then why, for this nothing, should one bind and torment Christian consciences?" Furthermore, twenty times, Luther states: "Confession is all right when it is voluntary and not forced." Or again: mass is neither a sacrifice nor a good work; it represents nevertheless "a manifestation of religion and a blessing of God." [11] Here we recognize the man who, in 1523, said without any beating about the bush: "If people wish to remain in the convents, whether because of their age, their bellies (*Bauch*) or their consciences, let us not turn them out. For we must remember that it is everybody's blindness and error that has reduced them to their state; they have been taught nothing that would enable them to fend for themselves." [12] And it was Luther moreover who, in the autumn of 1524 (the afternoon of October 9, to be exact), insisted upon wearing his Augustinian robe, no doubt in defiance and in derision of

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[11] Letter to Michael von der Strassen, Oct. 16, 1523; described in End., IV, no. 719, p. 246; printed in E., LIII, no. 86 p. 218.

[12] Preface of the *Ordnung eines gemeinen Kastens* addressed to the community of Leisnig the last of January, 1523; quoted in End., IV, no. 620, p. 71; printed in E., XXII, 106 and De Wette, II, 519, p. 382.

the Pope, but also, as he wrote, to lend countenance to the weak.[18]

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He was pushed, hauled, and challenged—the Luther of this period. All they got out of him was further rumination of the solutions he had earlier evolved, reëxamination of old questions, deeper thought which should have the effect of confirming him in his disinclination to act and of fortifying him with more arguments. Obstinate persistence, indeed, wrested from him several plans for a religious organization, but these were sketchy and provisional. And how could they be anything else? Since the incomparable treasure of belief in Christ comprised man's complete and sole happiness, any outward observances could serve only to interfere with the free communion between God and the faithful. In 1523, Luther consented to express his views on the organization of a sect. He published in December of the same year his *Formula Missae et Communionis* for the church of Wittenberg. He began work on a German mass. In January, 1526, the *Deutsche Messe und Ordnung Gottesdiensts* appeared. All this, while it bore scant relation to coherence and logic, was a manifestation of that conscientiousness with which Luther treated all questions. Compromises! People should treat them as they do old shoes: when they are worn out, throw them away. Even now, so far as he was concerned personally, Luther would

[18] *Nam et ego incipiam tendem cucullum abjicere, quem ad sustentationem infirmorum et ad ludibrium Papæ hactenus retinui* (to Capiton, May 25, 1524; End., IV, 797, p. 348).

prefer not to publish anything of the sort. The true believers worship God in spirit and in truth. To the humble and the ignorant, however, he made this reluctant concession. A prudent concession, moreover: he did not assume the responsibility of organizing, administering and conducting the business of the visible Church to which the "ritualists" had been begging him to give concrete form. All this Luther persisted in leaving to the State. Which shows clearly enough how unimportant and secondary he deemed it.

But how about the state, politics, the princes? Luther had already expressed himself on these burning questions in his *Treue Vermahung* of 1521. Since people insisted; since the Anabaptists for their part were treating the question in a spirit of intransigent violence; since Germany was threatened with clouds so dark and menacing that the most blind and indifferent had to notice them gathering on the blackened horizon, he would recapitulate in his treatise *On Secular Authority*, December, 1522, what he had stated before, but with more force, more detail and exactitude.

One cannot attribute any great regard for princes to the man who had addressed the Elector Frederick in such terms as appear above, the man who avoided, as a bore and a nuisance, occasions for seeing and talking with men like Frederick.[14] In so far as was becoming in a Christian

[14] W., XVIII, 85, *Wider die himmlischen Propheten: Ich haben meyn Leben lang mit dem selben Fursten nie keyn Wort geredt, noch horen reden, dazu auch seyn Angesicht nich gesehen, denn eyn mal zu Worms, fur dem Keyser.* —The *Von Weltlicher Obrigkeit* is in W., XI, p. 229-281.

and preacher of the Word, he despised these worldly powers; he was not silent before the people with regard to any of their vices, extortions, or even crimes. He foretold the troubles in store for them. "The people are stirred everywhere, and their eyes have been opened," he wrote on March 19, 1522. "They no longer will, or can, be oppressed by force. It is the Lord who is directing all this and hiding these imminent threats and dangers from the eyes of the princes. He will accomplish His ends through their blindness and violence; I seem to see Germany weltering in blood!" [15] The days were gone long since when the princes hunted down men like wild beasts. But what now? Was it right to rebel against these wicked and cruel despots, these evil tyrants who oppressed Christian folk? That would be folly and impiety. God intended these miserable princes to be such. If it was the design of Providence, they would be brought to book. If not, all human efforts to resist them were worse than foolish: they were blasphemous.

The princes were scourges, but they were God's scourges. They were bullies, torments and butchers, but God had ordained them to subject the lawless and induce through fear a reign of external peace and order in a depraved society. "Our Lord is a mighty monarch," writes Luther in the tone of those eloquent orators who proclaim

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[15] End., III, 498, p. 316, Luther to W. Link.—Luther adds, citing Ezekiel: "*Ora cum tuis nobiscum et ponamus nos murum contra Deum pro populo in ista die furoris sui magni.*"—It is this letter which terminates in the famous: "*Sobrius hæc scribo et mane, piæ plenitudine fiduciæ cordis,*" in which Denifle saw the cynical confession of a drunkard.

the emptiness of all earthly greatness; "He has use for noble, illustrious and rich butchers—princes, in other words." [16] So, these haughty and vexatious personages were necessary and legitimate, and, whatever their faults, they should be respected—in the temporal order at least, the only one in which the princes were princes and in which good people were subject to them, in a spirit of resignation and charity, because they remembered always that irresponsible minority, criminals, unprincipled men, evil-doers, who make dungeons and shackles necessary. In the spiritual order, however, all Christians were equal in the presence of their God.[17] Princes could make no claim to prerogatives there, nor presume to legislate on points of faith or to state what Christians should or should not believe. Their subjects, however, on the other hand, must expect this spirit of mercy and charity to flourish only in the kingdom of Christ; in the earthly kingdom it was not charity, mercy and grace that prevailed in all things, but anger, stern justice, and human authority founded on reason.

Thus Luther, faithful to his old ideas, kept maintaining the sharp opposition between spiritual life and material life. He continued to treat human beings as strange compounds, partly Christian and partly secular: the secular man was subject to domination, submissive to princes,

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[16] W., XI, 168 (*Von Weltlicher Obrigkeit*): *Denn es sind Gottis Stockmeyster und Hencker, und seyn gotlicher zorn gebrancht yhr, zu straffen die bosen und eusserlichen fride zu hallten. Es ist eyn grosser Herr, unser Gott.*

[17] Also God had established two governments. The one, spiritual, was directed through the Holy Spirit by Christ; it was made up of Christians and the pious. The other, the temporal, included the impious and the wicked, and forced them to keep the peace. (*Ibid.*, W., XI, 2).

obedient to laws; the Christian was free of all dominations, enfranchised, a true priest and king. It was an ingenious solution, at least on paper; there the frontiers of the two kingdoms could be traced without difficulty. But once a crisis arose that would throw into violent conflict these Christian sentiments and secular obligations, was this subtle distinction likely to stand the test? In the summer of 1524 the peasants of Swabia assumed the responsibility of putting it to the proof.

## III

The Peasants' War furnished the occasion for Martin Luther's great renunciation. At least, so tradition says. But did it, or did it not? We do not need to tell what the uprising of 1524-1525 was, how many other revolts had preceded it, or what men, of very diverse origins and tendencies, took part in the character of leaders or men of action. But it was quite natural that Luther's position should have been of interest to both sides from the start. On the one hand he was naturally regarded as the author and instigator of sedition; his doctrines, his preaching, his baneful example had provoked it; and if there was need to repress the rebels, it was still more necessary to punish the agent of Satan who, having sowed the wind over peaceable Germany, was now reaping the tempest. The others, no less naturally, hailed Luther as the official champion of the oppressed, the born patron of the rebels, the natural foe of all tyranny. And besides, were not they,

the peasants, the true champions of the Gospel against the princes? At the head of their articles did they not claim the right to elect pastors [18] who, translating clearly the Holy Word and preaching it without adulteration, would put them in the way of prayerfully seeking and enjoying the true faith? Let us not be surprised that, late in April, 1525, Luther finally intervened and published his famous "Exhortation to Peace with reference to the Twelve Articles of the peasants of Swabia, and also, against the spirit of murder and brigandage of other aroused peasantry." [19]

Its plan is clear; its thesis simple. A short introduction, then two separate discussions, the one with the princes, the other, much longer, with the peasants; in conclusion, a few phrases of exhortation to both parties. But, what is its purpose? To determine the justice or injustice of the peasants' demands? In a fashion. But mainly, to deal with a point of religion.

The peasants said: "We are neither rebels nor revolutionists, but the messengers of the Gospel. That which we demand, the Gospel justifies us in demanding." That pretension is the only one which Luther attacks, but with what incomparable violence, passion and fury! To the princes his words are few and vague: those who prohibit the preaching of the Gospel are in the wrong, as are those who oppress their people with too heavy burdens. They should strive to assuage the passions which they had

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[18] This was article I of the famous Twelve Articles of the Peasants.

[19] *Ermahnung zum Frieden auf die zwolf Artikel der Bauerschaft in Schwaben*, W., XVIII, 279-334.

aroused and to treat the peasants "as a man in his right mind treats people who are drunk or out of their senses." This would be both expedient and just, in the humane sense of the word; authority was not instituted in order that subjects might serve for the gratification of their masters' caprices. But once he had finished this mild discourse in the conditional tense, how clearly and sonorously Martin Luther speaks as he launches upon his crushing harangue to the peasants! To claim the support of the Gospel? What monstrous nonsense! Let them burn him, torture him, tear him into pieces—as long as there remains a breath in his body he will shout the truth: the Gospel does not justify, but condemns revolt. All revolt.

They said, the peasants: "We are in the right, they are in the wrong. We are oppressed and they are unjust." That may be. Luther goes further and says, I believe it. And then? "Neither oppression nor injustice excuses revolt." The Gospel teaches: "Resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also." Has he, Luther, ever drawn the sword or preached revolt? No, only obedience. And that is why God has protected his life and favored the spread of his doctrine in spite of the Pope and the princes. Those who "would follow their natural promptings and not submit to their wrongs" are pagans. Christians do not fight with sword and arquebus. Their arms are the cross and patience. And if the authority that oppresses them is really unjust they should have no fear, for God will make the tyrant do

penance for his injustice. In the meantime they must restrain themselves, obey, and suffer in silence.[20]

That is the doctrine of the "Exhortation to Peace." And certainly it is easy to be ironical, easy to point out the Gargantuan humor of this singular contrast: in the midst of the tumult and the cries of hate, Luther facing the chaos of battle shouts and incendiary confusion, his eyes raised to heaven, Dr. Martin Luther puffing out his cheeks and piping with all his soul his own little tune on a Christian flageolet, as if he could see and hear nothing but himself. A matter of temperament. But there is one thing nobody can say: he was not, in this delicate situation, inventing insincere arguments.

His doctrine? It was not born of expediency or shaped by a peasants' revolt. Had it not already inspired the letter to Frederick [21] of March 5, 1522? "Only He who has instituted it with his own hands can destroy and ruin Authority: so it follows that if there is any revolt, it is against God!" Does not such a view animate from beginning to end the treatise of 1523 on *Secular Authority*: Christ's kingdom on the one hand, the kingdom of this world on the other, and in this kingdom absolute obedience to its kings, even if their orders are unjust. For the proverb has truly said: he who strikes blows is in the wrong; and no

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[20] *Da habt yhr alle beyde Teyl euer gewis Urteyl von Gott, das weys ich fur war.*—That is the conclusion (W., XVIII, 333-334).

[21] See above, pp. ? And, in the same letter, this passage: *Denn die Gewalt soll niemand brechen noch widerstehen, denn alleine der, der sie eingesetzt hat; sonst ist Empörung und wider Gott,*

man can be judge in his own case.[22] No, in truth, Luther invented nothing new, in 1525, when he exhorted the serfs to be resigned and the peasants to humble themselves. And when he added: "The only liberty for which you should care is spiritual liberty; the only rights you can legitimately demand are those that pertain to your spiritual life," these formulæ, though they sound ridiculous in the extreme when addressed to simple folk driven to desperation and fighting like beasts for their lives, are such as Luther, the real Luther, the Luther of Leipzig, of Worms and of the Wartburg, may well cling to implacably for the sake of his own integrity.

Yes, it is easy to be ironical. But is the French spirit of malice or the scorn of an anti-Lutheran a proper guide to an understanding of Luther and, through him, of the German Reformation, and also, incidentally, of one of the most striking manifestations in history of the German spirit?

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Michelet thought not, for he wrote in his *Mémoires de Luther* (and with special reference to the *Exhortation*): "No where else, perhaps, did Luther achieve such heights." No doubt, at the time when he was assembling his documents, the historian found himself particularly moved by the torrential force, the terrific ardor of the religious emotion that mastered, transported, overwhelmed and carried away the reformer, so that speech here gushed forth from

[22] Weimar, VIII, 680-681: *Da her Kompt das ware Sprichwort: War wyderschlegt, der ist Unrecht, Item, niemant Kan seyn eygen Richter seyn.*

his heart to spread over the world like the waves on a beach, first eddies and then the irresistible force of the incoming tide—an event explaining exactly what needed to be explained: the fact of Luther's success, of his power over men, the mysterious and vital radiance of his personality. But there is another thing. The capital importance of the crisis of 1525 is that it enables us to tear away all veils and see and measure for the first time, in the clear light of fact, the important historical consequences of the words and actions of a Martin Luther.

Certainly the historians are right who, sensible of the facts, note how the attitude of Luther at this date shocked and dismayed the peasants, the revolutionists, all those who had carried far beyond the limits Luther contemplated the movement that the fearless Augustinian had begun. They are right to insist on one fact: after launching his *Exhortation* and thundering this doctrinal condemnation of the revolt, which he softened a bit at the end by appealing to arbitration, Luther took care to hold his peace; he remained calm and compassionate, outside the fray. During the spring of 1525 the peasant revolt continued to spread. Everywhere towns were pillaged, castles were seized, abbeys sacked. In Thuringia, Thomas Münzer established a species of communism; his appeals, to the sinister refrain "*Dran, dran*!" (up and at them!), sounded like a tocsin; he implored his followers not to let the hot blood on their swords grow cool. But the princes, little by little, became organized. On May 15, 1525, at Frankenhausen, Münzer's army was defeated; its leader was captured and put to

death. On May 18, at Lupfenstein, the duke Anton crushed the Rustauds (rustics), then seized Saverne. In June the Franconian rebels were cut to pieces at Adolzfurt. Reprisals began; they were terrible. In a ravaged Germany encumbered with smoking ruins, where the horrible spectre of famine hovered over the wasted fields and the empty barns, the princes, as one of them said, played at bowls in their turn with the heads of the peasants.

And Luther, the Luther who in December, 1522, in the treatise *On Secular Authority*, had declared with so much energy: the judge should be stern, power should be implacable, repression should be carried without false sentimentality to the point of cruelty: for mercy has nothing to do with secular life—the Luther who in 1524, in his paper *Against the Celestial Prophets*, had stated his opinion with such perfect clarity: *Herr Omnes*? the only way to make him do what he ought to do "is to constrain him by Law and the Sword to a semblance of piety, as one holds wild beasts by chains and cages";[23] the Luther who in the same work wrote, arguing the right of the prince to expel Carlstadt: "Now I think thus: the country belongs to the princes and not to Carlstadt, who is only a lodger and owns nothing. Has not the master of a house the right and the power to turn out a lodger or a hireling? If he had first to give his reasons and argue law with him, he would be a poor sort of master, a prisoner on his own property,

[23] *Wider die himmlischen Propheten*, W., XVIII 66: *wie man die wilden Thiere mit Ketten und Kercker hellt*.

and the lodger would take his place as true master!" [24]— this Luther was not the man to change his opinions in view of peasant excesses and the countless disturbances of 1525. When we know in addition of the efforts made to involve him, the objections, the accusations and direct reproaches which cut him to the quick and incited him, in a spirit of bravado, to an even fiercer intransigency, we shall not be surprised that finally, in May, 1525, when the princes had scored their first successes and reprisals had begun, he again took up his pen and indited "against the plundering and murderous peasant bands" a little book of a sanguinary sternness and violence.[25]

His letters meanwhile breathed only anger. "What right had they to show such clemency to the peasants? If there were any innocent among them God would surely protect and save them, as he did Lot and Jeremiah." [26] It is close to the famous saying: "Let us kill them—God will recognize His!" "If God does not save them, it is because they are criminals. At the very least they were silent; they let events take their course; they assented." "My sentiment is clear," he wrote to Amsdorf,[27] May 30, 1525, just as the

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[24] *Ibid.*, p. 100: *So meyne ich, das land sey der Fursten zu Sachssen und nicht D. Carlstadt, darymnen er eyn Gast ist, und nichts hat.* And all the passage.

[25] *Wider die raûberischen und mörderischen Rotten der Bauern* (W., XVIII, 344-361).

[26] De Wette, II, 669.

[27] End., V, no. 935, p. 183: *Ego sic sentio, melius esse omnes rusticos cædi quam Principes et magistratus, eo quod rustici sine autoritate Dei gladium accipiunt . . . Nulla misericordia, nulla patientia rusticis debetur, sed ra et indignatio Dei et hominum.*

fortunes of war had changed: "better the death of all the peasants than of the princes and magistrates." And when he hears of the capture of Münzer:—"Whoever has seen Münzer can well say he has seen the devil incarnate, in his maddest frenzy! O Lord God, if such a spirit reigns among the peasants, it is high time to cut their throats like mad dogs!" [28] And this man who was banished from Worms and placed under the solemn ban of the Empire declares without beating about the bush: "A man who is convicted of the crime of rebellion is under the ban of God and the Emperor, and every Christian can and should slaughter him and will thus be doing a good deed!" Here is a mad dog. If you do not strike him down he will kill you. After this it is easy to understand the homicidal fury of his words of May, 1525: "For all these reasons, my Lords,[29] do not stay your hands. Save us, help us, have pity on us; exterminate, slay; let whoever has the power use it!" Luther goes almost to the point of forgetting his theology in the words with which he concludes: "We are living in such extraordinary times that a prince can win heaven by spilling blood much more easily than others by praying!"

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One can easily divine the consequence of such an attitude, and how it isolated Luther, how it turned from him a part, and this the most ardent, of that great mass of hu-

[28] End., V, no. 934, p. 181.—E., LIII, p. 306.

[29] *Drumb, lieben Herren, loset hie, rettet hie, hellft hie, erbarmet euch der armen Leute,* etc.—W., XVIII, p. 361.

manity whom his utterance had once moved and stirred so profoundly. Certainly it was vain to oppose to his letter of May, that veritable Exhortation to the Butcher, which followed so soon after the choleric *Exhortation to Peace*, such statements as those he launched from the altitude of his pulpit in Wittenberg in 1522 upon his return from the Wartburg: "I condemn only by speech. It is by words we must fight, by words we must conquer, and by words tear down what has been erected by force and violence." Luther replied that he was thinking then only of verbal excesses; but the peasants of 1525 were not mere fanatics; they were rebels in open revolt. Luther had his answer. And yet he could not at this date have helped seeing suddenly, by the light of incendiary fires, how erroneous was the conception, how vain was the hope, as he was one day to concede, on which he had ignorantly based his general ideas about life and the world.

The world is bad, said the Catholic piety. So bad that man is foolish to struggle with it; yet he is so deeply involved in it that, however heroic, however sustained his efforts may be, his innate wickedness will vitiate his acts and set his resolutions at naught. For those who foster within their souls a high ideal of sacrifice and sanctity there is only one recourse: to flee the world. To cut themselves off while still living from other living beings. To lead, apart from the world, in cloistered sanctuaries, a life of prayer, mortifications, and renunciation; to offer themselves to God in expiatory sacrifice for their own and others' sins.

Delusion and blasphemy, Luther had cried. The world is the world. The spectacle it presents is one that God Himself designed. And it is He also who has placed us, like actors, in this tragic and miserable setting. Let us not try to escape it. Let us live in the world. Let us fulfil, whether we be princes or merchants, judges, executioners or soldiers, the functions that have been confided to us. Let us accept them, for the love of those who benefit by them. But as Christians let us live spiritually in another world: in the kingdom of Christ, where, devoting ourselves to the quest of salvation, we shall practise charity, mercy, the superior virtues that have nothing in common with the finite world, which is given over to passion, violence and the sword.

Of course we must submit to political, economic and juridical necessities; submit to oppressive laws, to the scourge of war, the injustices of princes, to all sorts of sacrifices. And of course so powerful a personality as Luther would understand how one's slightest movement is apt to smash everything. He understood this, he knew it. He was therefore the more insistent: "Let us remain peaceful. What does it profit us to break up everything, demolish everything, to build a larger house? Let us yield, at the price of perpetual restraint, to the stern necessities of the secular world. What does it matter, since our soul, the soul of a Christian and believer, escapes freely from its cage? In the subtle ether of the spiritual world, where there are neither laws, nor taxes, nor boundaries, the soul can revel

in its power and enjoy a royal freedom. Moving without fear from the summit of the virtues to the abyss of the vices, let it penetrate beyond the realm of impurities and stains to a free enjoyment of spiritual peace. At the end of its experiences, at last, it will enter into direct and immediate communication with the fount of all creative energy, the sovereign creator, God. In the flame which surrounds Him, embracing all those who approach Him with shame at being what they are, with a touching sense of their own unworthiness, with an infinite faith in His mercy, everything melts away and is consumed: sins and vices, misery and weakness, the alloy and the dross. This is the complete liberation and pardon, the entry into that world where, laws abolished, sin burned away, death vanquished, the soul finds itself beyond good and evil. It is salvation by faith.

What certainty, then, for the Christian? God enters into him, penetrates his being and inspires him, makes of his life an uninterrupted succession of fruitful creations and of his heart a source of illimitable love. His works spring from the faith that they nourish, thus completing an unbroken circle. "Faith pours itself out in good works, and by good works is again fortified, as the sun rises till the moment of its setting and returns to its starting place to rise again." [80] In the face of such prospects and such intoxicating bliss, what mattered the cares and the misery of this world?

[80] Quoted by Will, p. 246.

Luther's eyes were full of these wonderful visions: he announced them to men, to mankind. And it was very beautiful, this appeal to the spiritual life, to the sovereign liberty of the spirit.

1525.—The revolt of the peasants. A sudden lightning flash cleared away the clouds of illusion. And Luther beheld the common man as he really was, his bludgeon in hand, his spear raised, coarse, wretched, and crude. A man who did not accept the walls of his cell, but beat against them with all his rude strength. Promise him the wonderful fruits of Christian liberty? More than foolish. Take part in his efforts, espouse his claims? Never. It was against God's will. And besides—that argument with which Luther had opposed the iconoclasts, "An idol is nothing in the world. Why, then, struggle against it?"—it applied equally to the princes: "What power have they over our souls? None. Why then revolt against a tyranny that has no hold upon our real selves?" No, no association with the rebels. Repress them sternly. Have no scruple about bashing in their insolent faces.

Thus all things would again be made clear. Everything would order itself anew satisfactorily. On one side, the heroes. A few rare geniuses, a few strong personalities, accepting with indifference external restraints, submitting, without protest or useless resistance, to all discomforts and petty annoyances, but knowing within themselves the true liberty, the superhuman happiness of escape from servitude, of holding all law for naught, of conducting the revolt of the free spirit against mechanical necessities. On the other

side, the masses, submissive to restraints, experiencing their salutary rigor, possessing, they too, in theory their spiritual liberty, but incapable of benefiting by it, men leading their lives within the confines of a patriarchal state operated and planned for all, which applied to its human chattels the methods of a more or less enlightened despotism.

Contrast this Lutheran society—which is destined in its mediocrity with its pharisaical and timorous moralism to achieve a perfect success in small matters but lapse into an utter passivity and indifference to the great—with the visionary faith animating a few heroic spirits, unencumbered persons or things, whose souls race through the spaces of the infinite, while their bodies remain on earth, wallowing in the common mire. Citizens? Yes, of the celestial city. As to the terrestial city, they aspire neither to direct it nor improve it. Docile subjects, model robots, they furnish the example of perfect submission to the orders of a Prince, who finally, riding high above the bowed heads of the universe, holds the unique power that none can contest.

Herein is contained the whole history and the whole philosophy of Lutheran Germany. It was conceived thus in Luther's dreams probably, but at least in his exhortations in the spring of 1525, when his inner tumult drove him to the harshest avowal of his beliefs.

# CHAPTER X

## AFTER 1525: IDEALISM AND LUTHERANISM

WHOEVER encounters Martin Luther's lament, so often repeated in the correspondence of these crucial years: "Why did not the Lord accept my life as an offering, which I made with such a pure heart? Why did He stay the malicious hand of the butchers?"—whoever has heard this cry will inevitably find one question rising to his lips. Have we not there simply the expression in mystic language of an obscure but overmastering feeling, the feeling of a man who, having climbed very high and attained a peak inaccessible to others, but not knowing how to dwell there, sees himself obliged to descend again?

At Wittenberg, at Worms, in the Wartburg, at Wittenberg again upon his return, Luther had intoxicated himself and others with his transcendent idealism. Without heeding the consequences, without regard for the powers of this world, without thought of realities, he had cried his faith. He had developed the beautiful, heroic and vivid poem of Christian liberty. He had first astonished, then captivated people by the romantic lights and shadows of his alternate faith in God and despair of himself; he had sung, turn about, in violently contrasted hymns,

the sovereign omnipotence of Grace and the abject impotence of the human will. He, the priest, lived in solitary grandeur, exalted and pure in his symbolic robes. And then—the envious had come, rivals, adversaries whom he had furnished with words and who profited by the liberty they owed to him to defame him, ridicule him, and ruin his credit by outbidding him. At their appeal, under their influence, the gross peasantry had risen in revolt against rulers, laws and established customs. They had frightfully caricatured that Christian liberty which had seemed so bright in 1520. Yes, Luther should have died before he was forced to witness such spectacles and before, having said all that he had said, he should see himself condemned to a life of mediocrity and of limited scope.

I

Luther did not die. He had to adapt himself. But there is much in the method of adaptation. We shall not attempt to explain in detail the method, or methods, he chose. That would require a volume in itself and is not to our present purpose. Faithful to our original object, let us stick to the region of psychological facts and content ourselves with noting as well as we can the rather abrupt pace and the vicissitudes of a retreat which was at first contested, then more and more solemn and resigned.

It was not Luther's way to crumble under the first heavy blow. Angry partisans leagued together to destroy his work. His strength as a propagandist seemed broken.

He did not retreat. He did not fall into contradictory utterances or recant once and for all. He put up a bold front. And to show the better that he had been right, that his rôle alone had been good, the only one played according to the teachings of Christ, he argued vigorously with those who surrounded him and were his neighbors. He did not outline his doctrine with a clear and sharp stroke; he did not define it rigorously from within; he charged down upon all those who, in his opinion, misinterpreted it, and in accordance with tried and proven tactics (though probably guided by instinct rather than calculation) he defended himself by a series of counter-attacks.

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In every respect his situation was uncomfortable. In 1523 and 1524, mere survival in the material sense was a difficult problem for Luther. His letters are only a succession of complaints. The Elector of Saxony, parsimonious and neglectful, indifferent towards those who served him,[1] was dilatory with his aid. Luther struggled along as best he could. He was not alone. All those who broke with Rome and violently left the Church, went to Wittenberg and wanted to see "the man of Worms," to ask for counsel, protection, and support. They came from Germany, from the countries of the north, from England, even from France. There were women also, nuns escaped from the convent and rejected by their families, who

[1] *Notum est ingenium principis, quod viros levipendit.* End., V, 849, p. 74, Nov. 24, 1524.

asked for daily bread, a refuge and security; these things seemed so easily possible for one whose voice had shaken their cloisters. Luther had to aid and harbor everybody. He begged; he threatened; sometimes he rose up in a fit of anger. Criticizing severely the proceedings of Frederick, he wrote one day to Spalatin:[2] "However, I think we neither have been, nor are, a burden to the Prince. An advantage? I will not speak of that: it may be you do not count as advantage this spread of the Gospel which you owe to us: how much, and again how much, of the good money of the realm has flowed into his cavernous purse, and is yet to flow with an ever increasing volume, in consequence of our efforts, not to mention the salvation of our souls." His bitterness now penetrates into other letters. To have given all of himself, and to reap only indifference.

So much the worse, Luther will not down. Again at the end of 1524 and the beginning of 1525, in a tract which sums up his criticisms of "the celestial prophets, on images and the sacrament," he launches a frontal attack upon those mystics who were eager only to immerse their souls in divine profundities. He did not cease to pursue with sarcasm and invective the Anabaptists and fanatics, followers of Carlstadt and Münzer. As to the peasants, brandishing above their hard heads their great clod-crushers of shoes, the traditional symbol of their rallies ("*Bundschuh, Bundschuh!*")—he told them categori-

[2] End., V, no. 849, p. 75, Nov. 27, 1524: *et substantia mundi non parva ad marsupium Principis redire cœpit ac quotidie magis redit.*

cally what he thought of their insurgent Evangelism. But he did not stop here. We see him attacking the solid phalanx of his Roman antagonists, and supporting and brandishing in the faces of the leaders of the German and Rhenish Reformation, such as Zwingli, Œcolampadius and Bucer, his doctrine of the real presence.

To the faithful of Strassburg, in 1524, he speaks of the temptations he had at the beginning, a passing inclination to affirm that "there is nothing in the Holy Sacrament but bread and wine. I was strongly drawn to the idea," he wrote; "I struggled;[3] I saw clearly that I could thus strike the strongest blow to popery. But what of it? I was bound; I could not throw off the restraint; the Word is too strong, nothing can tear it from my soul." Luther deceived himself. It was his sentiment, his religious instinct that "bound" him. Without changing his heart or bartering his soul how could he indeed have renounced the Lord's Supper, the receiving of the flesh and blood, the living substance of God, which, entering into him, exalted all his powers? All his being revolted against the common-sense conceptions of the Swiss, their crass reasonable theology. In his pamphlet against the "celestial prophets," discussing the opinion of Carlstadt "that people could not in reason conceive of the body of Jesus Christ being reduced to such a small space": "In reason?" he cried: "But if we consult reason we shall no longer

[3] Letter (in German) quoted in End., V, p. 303; text printed in E., LIII, p. 364, no. 159.

believe in any mystery!" Here the great word is spoken.[4] Here the enemy is uncovered, upon whom Luther, a believer but not a leader, threw himself blindly the moment their paths crossed.

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And it is this same spirit exactly, this same enemy, that he was tracking down simultaneously in Erasmus. Luther was not yet Luther; but already, as we have seen, he abhorred in the author of the *Enchiridion* the clear intelligence that gloried in its clarity, the reasoning that was inimical to mysticism and to all those obscurities that intuition perceives. Once he uttered a striking mot to be found in the collection of Cordatus.[5] It was in the spring of 1533. "There is not an article of faith, however well confirmed by the Gospel, that an Erasmus cannot turn to ridicule in the name of Reason"—*Ab Erasmo, id est a ratione.* There is the secret of a violent hatred, one of those burning and maddening hatreds peculiar to men of God, that hatred of sin incarnate in a neighbor which leads even to homicidal mania. In these years it appears abundantly in the *Table Talk*: Luther raved furiously against Erasmus. And that he should have consented, he whom no consideration could hold back when the blood mounted from his heart to his head, that he should have consented for so many months to keep this furious hatred almost hidden; that again in April, 1524, he should have

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[4] For comparison, the text quoted by Cristiani, *Du Luthéranisme au Protestantisme*, p. 118 (W., VI, p. 290-291). And many others.

[5] *Tischreden*, W., III, p. 264, no. 3316.

written "to the king of amphibology," to this "serpent," a long letter proposing for the last time this bargain: "Publish no books against me and I'll publish none against you"—in truth, among all the testimonials the great humanist received during his lifetime, I know of none more beautiful or, as coming from such an enemy, so triumphant, none that betrayed more involuntary respect.

But at length the duel was inevitable. It was Erasmus who first gave battle. For reasons well known today, he published on the first of September, 1524, his famous diatribe on free will. His choice of a subject alone was a fresh evidence of his eminent and lively critical intelligence. Luther did not deceive himself about that. He did not hesitate to say so quite definitely in the first lines of his reply:[6] "You do not tire me with irrelevant quibblings on the papacy, purgatory, indulgences and the other trivialities with which I am constantly harassed. You alone have hit the nail on the head, you alone have hit straight in the bull's-eye. Thanks, Erasmus!" This reply of Luther's, his tract, "*On Predestination*," did not appear, moreover, until the very end of 1525, December 31. And it was not until September of the same year, one whole year after the challenge, that Luther began to compose it. His adversary was redoubtable, and, intrepid as he was himself, Luther could not help some trepidation at the thought of affronting him. But, as soon as Luther had made up his mind to write, his thoughts arrayed them-

[6] W., XVIII, p. 602.

selves with irresistible force, abundance, and power. It was as if he were staking on that particular move in the game his whole conception of religion.

It has been said that instead of entitling their two papers *On Free Will* and *On Predestination,* the two antagonists might have named them *On Natural Religion* and *On Supernatural Religion.* The author of the *Predestination* could not vacillate between the omnipotence of God and the initiative of man, who, to a semi-rationalist like Erasmus, was free to effect and accept a compromise without any of the emotion that was excited by a vehement belief in the irrational omnipotence of God. But in God's omnipotence alone Luther saw the indispensable guarantee that might help one to know that he had been saved. Not seeing any way to reconcile his personal faith in the absolute omnipotence of God with the affirmation of free will, revolting as he did against the idea that the human will could put limits to the divine will and supplant it, he swung at one stroke, with a movement characteristic of his genius, to the other extreme. He repudiated free will purely and simply. He asserted once again that everything that happened to man and made for his salvation was only the effect of this absolute and sovereign cause, the irresistible and never failing force: God, the God "who is all in all." And this was not for Luther a philosophical thesis, resting upon rational arguments, but the spontaneous cry of a believer who was confessing his faith "with his full soul and with no reservations"; it was the impassioned protestation of a Christian "who would

not sell his adored Jesus" and who, always bound by his own experiences and bearing always within his soul "those spiritual distresses and divine awakenings, those deaths and those hells" through which he had sought and discovered his God, found quiet and release only in the total abandon, the unreserved surrender of his own will into the hands of the Supreme Guide.

His contemporaries, however, did not have the leisure to inquire, as interested spectators, into all this religious psychology, rich as it was. They saw in the brutal clash of the two "wills," the free and the predestinate, the final and irremediable break between humanistic thought and Christian feeling as Luther interpreted it. Some applauded, others deplored. But, after this ringing controversy, they had to choose. It became impossible, without treachery to one or the other of the two antagonists to reconcile fidelity to Luther and his teachings with admiration for Erasmus and his work, which was both critical and positive. Luther was not disturbed by that. He had obeyed unreservedly the blind impulse of his genius. The fact had to be faced, nevertheless. The ditch that he had digged separated henceforth the learned group of Erasmians and the little company of strict Lutherans, whose leader, at that time, seemed to be working to limit rather than increase their numbers.

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The leader? Luther would have protested against any such designation. And with reason; for if he had been a

captain, a leader of men, he would have done everything possible to prevent, or at least smooth over these ruptures. Instead of furiously attacking Erasmus, he would on the contrary, no matter what the humanist wrote or said, have hailed him, adroitly and with a gentle but invincible pertinacity, as a forerunner and a necessary precursor. In the fact that any such concern was foreign to his nature Luther might have seen the proof that he was an incorrigible idealist, actuated by an internal force stronger than any calculation. But what he did not see was how his idealism, which had formerly stirred him to conquest, was now turning to conservatism. He no longer forced himself to revolve propositions that at first repelled him with a view to turning them to his own account; he no longer tried to assimilate them and thus broaden his thought and enrich his emotions. On the contrary, he distinguished, discriminated and rejected.

And yet, did he not remain fundamentally the same, with his brusk explosions, his violent gusts of passion, that indefinable mixture of naïveté and crudity which attracts and at the same time repels the man of moderation? The violence of his religious impulses at moments choked him. And far from attempting to allay it, he gloried in it. He enjoyed shocking others and perhaps himself. He indulged complacently his taste for bravado and scandalization. This was manifest once more in his dramatic gesture of June 1525. He married Catherine von Bora, a young unfrocked nun.

He had often enough said, God knows, that he would

not marry! On November 30, 1524, returning to a familiar theme he wrote to Spalatin:[7] "As long as I am in the mind I have been and always am, I shall not take a wife. Not that I lack the natural promptings of the flesh and my sex; I am not made of wood, nor of stone; but my mind is averse to marriage, considering that the anticipation of death and of the tortures meted out to heretics hangs over me constantly." It is true that he added in the same letter: "I am in the hands of God, a creature whose heart He can change again and again, whose life He can sustain or snuff out at any hour or any minute." But in April he was still of the same mind:[8] "Do not be surprised that I do not marry, I the lover whom all decry!" Two months later he was the husband of the meek and gentle Catherine von Bora.

We shall never understand, and it is useless to attempt to interpret, this sentence which Luther wrote to his colleague Amsdorf:[9] "No love, no passion, but a great affection for my wife!" Were the reasons the newly married husband gave to his friend to explain the union the only and the true ones? "I hope to have only a short time longer to live[10] and, out of a final regard for my father's ex-

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[7] End., V, no. 450, p. 77, Nov. 30, 1524: *Animus est alienus a conjugis, cum exspectum quotidie mortem et meritum haereticus supplicium.*

[8] End., V, no. 916, p. 157, April 16, 1525: *Nolo hoc mireris, me non ducere, qui sic famosus sum amator.*

[9] *Nec amo, nec æstuo, sed diligo uxorem,* End., V, no. 957, p. 204, June 12, 1525.

[10] End., *id., ibid.* For the interpretation we have given to the first phrase: *"Spero enim me breve tempus adhuc victurum,"* cf. End., V, no. 850, p. 77, Nov. 30, 1524: *"Spero autem quod (Deus) non sinet me diu vivere."*

pressed wish, I did not want to refuse him the hope of posterity. And then, at the same time, I make my practice conform with my affirmations. There are so many on the contrary who indulge a skulking cowardice in this great flowering time of the Gospel!" Should we see, then, in this surprising and, to his contemporaries, rather inexplicable haste—the union was decided in only a few days—a last, dramatic gesture, by which Luther hoped to silence those who went about saying that the hero had given place to a coward and that the man of Worms, forever dead, had given place to a prince's valet? However indifferent we may suppose Luther to have been to the material consequences of his acts and preachments, one can hardly doubt that he was deeply conscious of the repercussion of dramatic events all around, which in one way or another affected him: the peasant revolt, the execution of Münzer—"It weighs heavily on my heart," he kept saying,[11]—the exile of Carlstadt, the duel with Erasmus, the vituperative assaults of the Anabaptists, of the lunatic fringe and, on the other side, of the Catholics, all of whom were in one way or another calling him to account. Should we assume then that his sudden marriage resulted from a troubled confusion which, to all indications, had seized him in these eventful years, the confusion of a man who, living in a wonderful dream, finds himself suddenly awak-

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[11] Cf. also *Tischreden*, W., I, no. 446, p. 195 (Collection of Veit Dietrich, beginning of 1533): *Sic occidi Muncerum etiam, der todt ligt auf mein hals. Feci autem ideo' quia ipse voluit occidere meum Christum.*

ened by malicious enemies and brought down from his great heights into an all too commonplace world?

That may very well be. But there is another thing: the strong sentiment expressed in a letter of January 5, 1526, addressed by Luther to Schuldorp,[12] who had just married his niece: "I too am married, and to a nun. I could have refrained, had I not special reasons to decide me. But I did it to defy the devil and his host, the objectors, the princes and bishops, since they were all foolish enough to forbid the clergy to marry. And I would with willing heart create an even greater scandal if I knew of anything else better calculated to please God and put them in a rage." A clear but not very subtle expression of a complex state of mind which we have encountered before. Doubtless defiance and bravado entered into the state of mind, and some verbal extravagance also; but even more, probably, of the same sentiment that inspired in 1521 his *Esto peccator et pecca fortiter,* and several years later, in 1530, his astonishing letter to Jerome Weller,[13] in which Luther displays with a truly remarkable lack of restraint and wealth of detail a method of treating the devil by alcohol and indulgence which is both naïve and subtle: "There are times when one should take a drop too much, disport and amuse oneself, in brief commit some sin in hatred

[12] Quoted in End., V, no. 1022, p. 303, which identifies the recipient. German text in E., LIII, p. 364 and De Wette, III, no. 771, p. 83, *loc. cit.*, p. 84.

[13] There are several letters to Weller in 1530, all of them interesting. The one quoted is of July sic, bearing the number 1737 in VII of Enders, *Loc. cit.*, p. 160.

and scorn of the devil, in order that he may not betray us into a conscientious fretfulness about trifles. So, if the devil says to you: 'Drink not!', answer him thus: 'I shall certainly drink, since you forbid it, and I shall drink deep!' One should always do just the contrary of what Satan bids!" And Luther adds: "What other reason do you think I should have for eating and drinking more and more to excess, for keeping less and less check upon my tongue? It is to mock and vex the devil, since he has but lately been mocking and vexing me!" And then, the famous outburst, which has made and will continue to make so much ink flow from confessional inkwells, sometimes black, sometimes rose: "Oh! if I could only conceive some enormous sin to confound the devil and make him understand that I do not confess to any sin, that my conscience reproaches me with none!"

Thus wrote the Luther of whom Melanchthon said, with a deep sigh: *"Utinam, Lutherus etiam taceret"*—oh, if he could only be silent! Thus was he one of the first to make, in the name of a great tribe of souls similarly afflicted, a public confession as a man who, tormented by hazy scruples, haunted by vague remorse and baseless fears, was striving with the frenzy of the damned to objectify his torment, to bring it into relation to some concrete sin easily recognizable as such, and who then, glorying in the sensation of new found freedom, finds in his very excesses a means of escape from his inner torment, of defeating his devil, and regaining the outer air.

II

We see what a poor representation of the real truth the traditional story gives. No, Luther did not make haste to disavow his past. Forced by the combined pressure of men and events to give ground, he concealed from himself the extent of the sacrifices he made in sharply consolidating his front against his too importunate adversaries. Or even in charging upon others who were not pressing him so closely, just to make a parade of his strength. But his doctrine, his ideas, his statements of the earlier period?

Certainly he clung to them with his whole soul. In his heart, often, in a debate with his conscience, he would swear: "No, I will not retract!" And he was sincere. But has anyone ever for months revolved the ideas and objections of furious and implacable adversaries without being harmed? From the instant one begins to seek in their doctrine a point of attack, one is subject inevitably to the chemical influences of mind upon mind. Imperceptibly, half consciously, half unconsciously, doctrine is manipulated to serve a strategic purpose. And that is what happened to Martin Luther, all the more easily since he was by temperament a polemicist.

We shall not try to consider every point, especially as theologians have already done so, with their usual subtlety and ability to grasp the fleeting nuances of an excessively luxuriant process of thought. Let us just consider a few of the most striking examples.

It was scarcely compatible with Luther's original senti-

ment to formulate a definite credo, or define his faith by an exact schedule of articles limited both as to phrasing and number, and to declare that outside of this schedule there was no salvation. Had he not once vigorously opposed the spirit to the letter,[14] to the point of claiming the right "to call by its true name every inadequacy of religious thought, even though it be found in the Bible itself": not, of course, in the name of the principle of free thinking, the very idea of which had filled him with horror, but as an inner testimony to the Word which the Christian feels, alive, in his heart. We see him first delivering his mind in chance utterances. "Do not rely too strongly on the spirit when you do not have the concrete Word on your side. It may not be a good spirit, but the devil from hell. And after all has not the Holy Spirit included all wisdom, all counsel and all mystery in the Word?" Certainly he was not denying the truth of his former bold assertions. But with bourgeois prudence he was putting on the damper. And, a grave thing, he now made the Word synonymous with the letter. Another time he said: "No stroke is made without reason, and even more truly, no word." And that is where a paper pope, in place of the flesh-and-blood pope, begins to overshadow the new faith.

Another example. Luther had said: "A Christian is beyond laws." The fanatics, making the most of this utterance, had urged the masses to put it into practise.

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[14] For comparison, cf. for instance: Will, p. 107-110.

Halt! Time to retrace our steps, prudently. Experience has taught its lesson. "Until now I have been foolish enough to expect something more than human reactions from men. I thought they could order their lives by the Gospel and be guided by laws and the sword." [15] And this is the fierce antinomian of 1520, the stubborn idealist who in a hundred ways on a hundred different occasions developed the same theme: *"Lege lata, fraus legis nascitur* [16]—To impose duties is to encourage smuggling." Here is Luther in quest of a law. He does not look for it in the New Testament. He does not reread the Sermon on the Mount, except for himself and his lieutenants, *sibi et amicis*. He goes straight to the Old Testament. Heretofore he had hotly rejected the Decalog as one of the out-of-date accessories of Jewish piety. Now he holds it up to the faithful: for them, "for the hard heads and coarse rascals one must have recourse to Moses and his law, and to Herod and his rods." And no discussion or opposition. Let them obey, without hesitation or murmuring. "It is forbidden to ask why God ordains this or that; we must obey without any words." *Rund und rein,* as he says somewhere.[17] You do not wish to obey like the others, to accept the common rule? Then get thee hence. The fields are free, the roads of exile already made for the rebellious. Perhaps one of them will finally lead you to a

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[15] End., VI, p. 6 (Jan. 7, 1527).

[16] *Tischreden,* W., III, p. 113, no. 2948*a* and *b* (Rec. by Cordatus, February, 1533).

[17] For comparison, cf. Will, p. 296 *sqq.*

country whose prince, sharing your ideas, will make them the standard for his subjects. Then you will become established there and will say in your turn to those who do not think as you do: "Get out. Go back there where I came from."

As for swords. There are princes to wield them in defence of the new order. Formerly, in the beautiful days of pure idealism, the prince was a scourge, the State was a chastisement; the free Christian accepted them only through charity for the weak, who had need of them. But now, Luther abandons reservations and modifications and the idea of charitable toleration on the part of free Christians. The State is of divine origin; that is the important thing. Twenty times in the prolix writings of 1529, 1530 and 1533, Luther reverts to the idea that it was he who had been first to recognize the absolute power of princes as plainly justified by God.[18] "Our teachings," he stated vehemently in 1525, "have accorded to secular sovereignty the plenitude of its rights and powers, thus doing what the popes have never done nor wanted to do." This is true. "In the times of papacy," as he says elsewhere, people did not believe that a subject should execute orders, however unjust, without protest. They thought that resistance to these orders, or to orders given by illegitimate authority, was enjoined upon them. "Illegitimate authority?" queries Luther. All authority is legitimate since it exists only through the implicit will of God. The most

[18] Cf. G. de Lagarde, *Recherches sur l'esprit politique de la Réforme*, p. 209 *sqq.*

odious tyrant should be obeyed as well as the most benevolent of kings. His acts? God wills them to be what they are. His orders? God allows him to issue them. The princes, all of them, are His lieutenants. They are gods; Luther did not wait for Bossuet to say, in 1527: "The Superiors are exalted to godhead by virtue of their charge, because they are vicars of God and His ministers." Elsewhere he expresses his thoughts more brutally: "The princes of the world are gods; the common herd, Satan." [19] How could there be revolt after that? Who would dare? In the name of what? No, no, better far that the tyrants should commit a hundred injustices against the people than that the people should commit one injustice against the tyrants. And a great flow of proverbs gushed from the lips of Martin Luther, heavy bourgeois proverbs which sum up crudely his limited experience: "Chairs should not climb upon tables. Children should not eat on the heads of their parents. . . ." Maxims of a Saxon worthy. They recall to the reader the humble origins of the prophet who, coming down from Sinai, relapses awkwardly into his shopkeeper's background of Eisleben or Mansfield, among the foremen and contractors. Let us not be astonished that Luther concedes more and more extensive rights to this divinely authorized State: the right to investigate the inner purity and sanctity of the Church, to control its teachings, to assure its orthodoxy, to expel

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[19] Principes mundi sunt dei, vulgus est Satan. *Tischreden*, W., I, no. 171 p. 79 (Veit Dietrich, beginning of 1532). Other texts, E., XLI, 209; W., XXVIII, 612; W., XVI, 106, etc.

heretics. In truth, he could rightfully say in 1533: "Since the apostolic age no doctor, writer, theologian or jurist has, with such mastery and such clarity as I, by the grace of God supported, instructed, and heartened the secular order in the possession of its rights." [20]

*Die Gewissen der weltlicher Stande* (the conscience of the secular order): the expression broadens the problem. It reveals a whole new conception of life, which Luther adopted more and more in these years of retraction. The power of the prince is delegated by the divine power. The whole world is, therefore, divinely ordered. The haughty indifference with which the idealist of 1520 regarded it is no longer acceptable after 1530. Worldly things now take on in his eyes a value nearly absolute. Are they not the gifts of God? To use them and to acquire them by labor is to please Him. Is it not He who has assigned to each of us here below his task, his professional function, his "vocation"? Of course the distinction between the two domains, spiritual and temporal, exists. But the contrast between them pales and becomes less violent. It is no longer a contrast in the real sense of the word; it is a gradation.

And so with all things. *Philosophiam de cœlo in terram evolavit:* we could, parodying the old formula, apply it to the Luther of the period after 1525. More exactly, he who formerly had been interested solely in what we call in our jargon spontaneity, individual creativeness, *élan*

[20] W., XXXVIII, 102.

*vital* and inner drive, now invokes, and frequently, the constraining mechanism of the law, the coercive and repressive action of the constituted authorities, social pressure of all sorts. Necessity triumphs.

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Only, all this is not so simple. Luther did not reverse his past teachings. He went back to them occasionally and repeated them. One feels that they remained alive in the depths of his heart. Unchanged? That is saying a great deal. They are not a faith any more; they are now an ideal, an ideal which he now holds up only to himself and his friends, the little number of men capable of pursuing it through the dangerous ways which it opens to them without straying or getting lost.

In other words, Luther was not the man to change the direction of his fire when a new situation developed, or when his responsibility was brought home to him. He did not renounce without protest all former projects and without thinking anything more of them erect whatever sort of edifice the circumstances demanded. He was a nervous, restless, unstable, introspective recluse; but when faced with difficulties, the protests of some, the exaggerations of others, the heavy stupidity of the masses, he experienced sudden revolts, fits of exhaustion, brutal rages, and his old self would reappear, the man of the common people, quickly angered and volleying threats of the lash and the whip. Meanwhile, on the other side, he would give himself over to dreams of withdrawing from the exist-

ing hodgepodge of ignorant and cultivated men and organizing a community of true saints who, banded together in the harmonious life of a spiritual cult, would realize as enlightened Christians that faith which Luther had ceased advocating for the masses. But the spectre of Anabaptist "sectarianism" would raise its head then, the menace of Münzer and Carlstadt. And he organized nothing. He talked and wrote, because he had to, for *Herr Omnes,* and in his own tongue, in the "vernacular," as they said in the sixteenth century. It is a significant thing, and has not been sufficiently considered, that Luther seldom wrote in anything but German after 1525. He renounced Latin, the universal language, the language of the élite. It was not Christendom that he was addressing, not even all Germany; it was Lutheran Saxony. So it is not surprising after 1530 to see Lutheranism arrested, and even retrograding. It was Luther himself who, more and more as the century advanced, renounced catholicity and humbly confined his efforts to the Wittenberg group.

Contradictions, yes. But not systematic ones. Sudden outbursts, explosions, vagaries. But was it a case of consistent effort to adapt? Never.

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Luther settled down rather heavily. Married, he indulged in the heavy pleasantries of the gross bourgeois husband. He crudely embraced his Catherine, his "beloved rib," his "empress Ketha." Children came to them. Now and then he worked with his hands to procure

money. He did turning, gardening and clock-making. Installed in his old convent, which the Elector had given him for a residence, he lived banally, in the midst of cries, confusion, the family washing and the children's litter. Just a man, a man growing heavier, fatter, more paunchy. Fatness invaded the lower part of his face. The ardent Augustinian with the flashing eyes, the Augustinian of the print of 1520, had faded into the past. When one examines the portraits of the doctor dated 1530 and 1533, one experiences the disturbing sensation of having many times encountered in German cities people made in his likeness—too many people, in too many cities. To one who is accustomed to the refined faces of some prelates, living masterpieces of Catholic piety, with their thin lips, spare features, the veiled flicker of a perpetual fire in the depths of their clear eyes, the aggressive vulgarity of this gross Luther of fifty comes as a surprise.[21]

The good doctor, however, was teaching and catechizing at Wittenberg. Also eating and drinking. From time to time there came to him a cask of wine; on feast days, forsaking the native brew, he would draw a good pint. People sent him hose, and were thanked in return. He found expressions that were sometimes a little surprising to celebrate these windfalls. Nevertheless his prestige was secure. He had his virtues, too. He knew nothing of avarice, or economy even. He liked to give. He was always very simple, accessible to all. Little by little he

[21] Denifle has devoted a study to the *Portraits de Luther*.

filled up his dwelling with lodgers, privileged persons envied by all, who, seated at the table of the great man, opened wide their ears that they might hear everything. But often Luther was silent. He would sit without saying a word. They respected his silence, charged with meditation and revery. Often too, he talked. And clumsy words fell from his lips, gross words even, for the master had a taste for a certain kind of filth, and this grew more pronounced with the passing years.[22] But sometimes, too, another man would peer out from that great, shapeless body—a poet who talked about nature, the beauty of the flowers, the songs of the birds, the depth and lustre of the eyes of animals,[23] all sorts of fresh and spontaneous utterances. Not much refinement perhaps. But a good and sensitive man with a heart always young and eyes always lively presided. It was like a sentimental visit to one of those rustic gardens, planted with roses and perfumed with carnations, that the Rhenish painters have abundantly delineated; or, if you prefer, a promenade in that naïve *Paradise* he liked to describe,[24] where there will be dogs, cats and the whole menagerie familiar to man; but the dogs' hides will be gilded and spangled with pearls; they will go unafraid among serpents without venom and wild beasts that do not bite, and guileless man will sport with them all: *et cum ipsis ludemus*. . . .

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[22] Numerous passages, gathered with love (or hate) in D.-P., *passim*; v. at the table, t. IV.

[23] Cf. for instance *Tischreden*, W., III, no. 2849, p. 26. *Oculi sunt donum præs tantissimum omnibus animantibus datum*, etc.

[24] *Tischreden*, W., I, no. 1150, p. 567 (1530; Veit Dietrich and Melder).

Fabrications of an innocent and rather prosy imagination, but they sufficed to delight the doctor, when he was not watching with interest the clouds that he loved and that furnished such facile similes as:[25] "See those clouds that are going over us without breaking? They are like false Evangelicals: they boast of being Christians, but where are the fruits they produce?" In those moments the prophet in Luther slept. But there were awakenings.

He was not, of course, a man of action. He claimed indeed that all action was useless, and that only one thing was good: to find refuge in the bosom of God, abdicating to him all personal will and human initiative. On this point Luther never compromised; and the last accusation that can be made against him is that he made himself train-bearer and lackey to princes for reasons of self-interest. He knew them, and he knew his own worth. He was not their official advocate or diplomatic agent. Rather, in a sense, he was their victim. On all occasions, until the very end, he insisted passionately that the Reformation was not in his eyes political, and that success for him had no relation to battles and negotiations. When Zwingli and Phillip of Hesse were planning, in order to defeat Charles V, a universal league of all the enemies of the imperial government, the Turks included, one man rose in opposition, and that man was Luther. He refused to join the enterprise. Once again, with formidable emphasis, he declared that no one had the right to take up

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[25] *Tischreden*, W., III, no. 3174a, p. 210 (1532; Cordatus).

arms in revolt against his legitimate sovereign. And his attitude certainly was in part, in a very large part, responsible for the Mühlberg disaster.

By a singular irony of fate, John Frederick, the nephew of Elector Frederick the Wise, lost his electorate in the battle, along with his liberty. This was chiefly the work of the man whom his uncle had sheltered in the Wartburg. But the day after Cappel what an explosion of joy there was in the house of Luther; truly a savage joy, the spiteful joy of a man who, affirming that the end justifies the means in certain exceptional cases, did not hesitate to affirm on one occasion, if we can believe the account of Cordatus:[26] "It is much better, it is much safer to say that Zwingli and Œcolampadius are damned rather than saved . . . For thus we save and protect the living who have survived them." But one must pause at such declarations as these: "If I had concluded the pact with the Sacramentarians, I should have had on my hands the bloodshed at Cappel."[27] And again: "Zwingli boasted publicly, 'Nothing will stop us! Forward! and you will see in less than three years Spain, England, France and all Germany vanquished by the Gospel!'[28] Alas for his imaginary victory, he perished himself; he distorted scandalously the lessons of the Gospel; he so strengthened the Papacy that today all of the Swiss are once again loyal to it."

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[26] *Tischreden*, W., III, no. 2845a, p. 22 (End of 1532; Cordatus).
[27] *Tischreden*, W., I, no. 140, p. 6 (End of 1531; Veit Dietrich).
[28] *Tischreden*, W., III, 2891b, p. 55 (Cordatus).

Here we have not only the pitiless verdict "Zwingli died the death of an assassin!" [29] but the satisfaction of a man who, having set up political inaction as an absolute law, congratulates himself for once upon the practical advantages of his abstinence. "Wait!" Luther waits, and sometimes bursts out in strange predictions. The world is so wicked, the princes are so base, all worldly powers so unfaithful to their duties. Is not the Antichrist triumphing? Is not Christ preparing to come and overwhelm him? Are not the premonitory signs of his coming and of the Judgment multiplying? Luther waited, and made his announcements. He fixed dates. When the Turks with gathering fury threw themselves on Germany, he saw in them Gog and Magog knocking at the gates of the Christian world. On Easter Day, 1545, he was sure, he affirmed, that the great mystery would conclude. The terrestrial Universe would crumble. And the just would be borne unto everlasting life.

III

One can better understand these dreams, which were also familiar to many other men of the times, and these imaginary excursions into a dramatic and rather immediate Beyond, when one considers in their disillusioning reality the everyday experiences of this prophet, who had become coarsened, domesticated, and bound by the thou-

[29] Statement recorded by Schlaginhausen.

sand ties of his matrimonial life. He was not completely domesticated, though, nor completely bound, for he always spoke of these marriage ties in a singular manner, as a man who is puzzled by them and sometimes rebels.

A monk still, and one who had taken the vow of chastity, and still nourished endless scruples, he was in difficulty all his life to provide a remedy, an excuse, a way of combatting the accusation of concubinage and fornication that too many ecclesiastics were shamelessly spreading before the eyes of a ribald public. To be sure, he tried later to broaden and deepen his conception of Christian marriage. Marriage, he asserted in 1532, is the basis of economics, politics and religion.[30] At times he is full of this notion. He points out that marriage is blessed of God, the first mode of life to have pleased the Creator; that He recommends, maintains and glorifies it. Does it not exist through all nature, joining animals to animals, plants to plants, and even stones and minerals to each other? [31] Once, anticipating Panurge and the eighth chapter of the third book, he goes so far as to proclaim the sexual parts the most honest and most beautiful of the entire human body,[32] *honestissimiæ et præstantissimæ partes corporis nostri,* because they conserve and perpetuate the species. And we know too his boisterous remark upon

[30] *Tischreden*, W., III, no. 2815, p. 6 (1532; Cordatus).

[31] *Conjugium est in tota natura. Etiam arbores maritentur, item gemmæ. Sic, inter saxa et lapides quoque est conjugium* (*Tischreden*, W., I, no. 7, p. 4, 1531, Veit Dietrich).

[32] E., *Op. exeg. lat.*, I, 212, Comm. on Genesis, chaps. 3-7.

eunuchs.[33] All that is very coherent. But, Luther had in his earlier preaching declared the conjugal act a sin. He had fallen victim to the prejudice of the over-scrupulous monk. His pessimism had done the rest, his notion of the Fall and of man's total depravity owing to Adam's sin. *Honestissimæ partes?* Yes; but, *per peccatum,* they became shameful parts, *turpissimæ factæ sunt.* It is a serious conclusion, unless Luther makes some exception in favor of married love.

The universal, ineluctable need he compares to the other physical necessities of man, "drinking, eating, spitting or going to the stool." After which he declares: "But it is a sin; and if God does not impute it to married folks, we have only His mercy to thank." Confusion and conflict of feeling—it tends to destroy the distinction between marriage and fornication or adultery. If marriage is intended to insure the satisfaction of a need, does it actually serve that end? If not the thought naturally arises of a second union, a salutary and liberating *Neben Ehe.* Right next door is Philip of Hesse and his Margaret von der Sale —the whole lamentable story of the "Counsel of Conscience" of 1539. But this throws some light too on such notorious pleasantries as: "If your wife refuses, take your servant!" [34] Or the astonishing words preserved to us by Cordatus:[35] "*Ach lieber Hergott!*" exclaimed the man of

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[33] *Ich wolt mir lieber zwey par ansetzen, den eins ausschneiden.* (*Tischreden,* W., III, no. 2865a, p. 38, 1532, Cordatus).

[34] W., t. X, part II, p. 290.—The text has naturally excited interminable discussions. Cf. Grisar, II, 505.

[35] *Tischreden,* W., III, 29, no. 2858a and b (1532; Cordatus).

God, "what a duty, to love one's wife and children!" And, allowing the fire of anti-legal anarchism which always smouldered within him to blaze once again, he declares: "The law creates the rebellion. It is also true in private life—so true that just for that exact reason we like harlots and hate our wives. Ah, he is a good husband indeed who loves his wife and little ones!" All these strange things, which surprise and shock us, reveal the uneasiness and nervousness of a man who, having thrown himself into the water, swims, but now and then asks: "What if I should hit a rock?"

Did he at least find intellectual and moral pleasure in his circle of friends and disciples? His table was surrounded by good young people, docile but uninspired, with the temperaments of retainers and trainbearers, chiefly useful in reducing the liberal precepts of the master to formulæ. Around his pulpit a gross, brutish people assembled; he had to speak to them without subtleties in order to force the elementary truths into their stubborn minds. What did they care about the spiritual mastery of the world which the new Gospel promised to believers, the ardent and creative faith which was alone important? Nothing, said Melanchthon sadly in 1546, the year of Luther's death. But Luther himself says:[36] "The peasants? Brutes. They think it is we who are inventing religion, and not that God creates it. When you question them they reply: '*Ia, ia*'; but they believe nothing!" Had

[36] *Tischreden*, W., III, 440, no. 3594 (Lauterbach and Weller); *ibid.*, no. 3366, p. 292 (Cordatus).

he, at least, a better opinion of the bourgeoisie? Alas! What utter skepticism is revealed in this tirade, written down in April, 1532, by Veit Dietrich:[87] "If I so desired, I could lead all Wittenberg back into its ancient errors in three sermons. I except Philip, and two or three among you, but how few! Oh, I would not have to retract what I have hitherto taught! I would say great things of it. I would simply add this tiny word, *but*. . . . 'All those things are perfectly just, *but* . . . we should rise higher.' " There is something terrifying in such words. But what of this: "To make people give up the Pope is more difficult than to make them accept Christ"; he frequently confided this to his guests. And what a strange dialog occurred between him and his Ketha [88] one day in January, 1533!

"Do you not think you are a saint?" the Doctor suddenly demanded of Catherine, who was stupefied. "Saint?" she protested. "How could I be a saint, a great sinner like me!" Then the Doctor, calling his hearers to witness, said: "You see how the papist abomination has poisoned our souls, how it has penetrated to our very marrow! It leaves us no more than enough sight for our good and bad actions!" Then, turning back to Catherine, "You believe you have been baptised, and that you are a Christian? Yes? Then believe that you are a saint! For the virtue of baptism is so great that it makes our sins not as if they had ceased to exist, but no longer damn-

[87] *Tischreden*, W., I, no. 244, p. 103.
[88] *Tischreden*, W., III; numerous versions no. 2933, pp. 94-97.

ing!" Candid in its audacity, his doctrine is purely, specifically, essentially Lutheran. But did Catherine von Bora retain her lesson? Was she, who shared the daily life of the Doctor, Lutheran in a different and better sense of the word than all those for whom Luther was synonymous with death to the Pope, the use of the wine in communion, marriage of the clergy, mass in German and sausages on Friday: chitterlings versus Lent, as Rabelais would say? So much then for Catherine von Bora and for others perhaps who were much more intelligent and much more important than she. But what of Melanchthon?

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We know that, in the first part of his career, the humanist and splendid Hellenist, who had brought to the new doctrine the prestige and the glory of his literary culture, deserved to be known as the master's disciple. It was he who, in his *Loci Communes* of 1521, gave the Lutheran doctrine its first solid, exact and official summation. The viewpoint of his master had possessed him completely. He was a second Luther, without the vigor of the first, without his astonishing richness of imagination and invention, without the fury or the boiling prophetic ardor of the Augustinian, but more of a logician, a better organizer, a sincere Irenæan and conciliatory withal; the man predestined to secure the acceptance of Luther by the humanists, to bring him patrons from among the Erasmians—if Luther cared for patrons. But, there was

the crisis of 1525. Not that which the peasant revolt brought about; about this their understanding was perfect. The gentle Philip, beside himself, aroused against the *vulgum pecus,* approved unreservedly Luther's attitude. In a sense he was even more harsh, more hostile to the rebels. He expressed for the peasants a hatred born of contempt and disgust. But 1525 was the year Luther married. And this marriage surprised, shocked, and a little scandalized the man without physical desires, the man of discernment and long vision who saw farther than Wittenberg and the Saxon Electorate. It was a mistake, this marriage. Melanchthon did not see what Luther gained by it, but all that he lost instead. In 1525 also occurred the decisive, inescapable, irremediable rupture with Erasmus, the violent shock of the two irreconcilable viewpoints. But Melanchthon cared for Erasmus, admired him and could not join in Luther's delirious outbursts against him.

Then he reflected. He took stock of the situation. In 1527, when the plague broke out in Wittenberg, he went to Jena. He thus escaped from the direct influence and personal ascendency of Luther. He made observations elsewhere. He saw all about him men uprooted and exiled from Saxony, who had shaken off the yoke of the old discipline but had not fully understood or assimilated the Lutheran doctrines. He saw a moral, religious and social disorder which frightened him, the moral disorder especially. He saw men swayed by egotism and evil passions, interpreting the doctrine of justification through

faith and salvation by divine grace as their fancy directed. To what end should they struggle, toil to make themselves better, do good? Why not just wait, without curbing the instincts or resisting the promptings of evil? God would intervene and accomplish the good which man is impotent to accomplish himself. Here Melanchthon took fright and reacted.[39]

No, Luther was wrong in preaching Predestination and writing that inopportune, violent and dangerous tract on the subject against Erasmus. He was wrong to repudiate Free Will; it made the vulgar, who did not understand him, averse to all effort, to all personal and moral initiative. Melanchthon indicates this in 1525 in his Latin articles written during his trip. He is even more explicit in 1532 in his commentary on the Epistle to the Romans. He develops the thought in great detail in the *Loci Communes* of 1535. He restores to the human will and human coöperation their dignity as a means to salvation. As the theologians say, he becomes (re-becomes) a synergist. To Luther who declared, "God saves whom he wills," he replies, "No. God saves those who wish to be saved." [40]

So much for Predestination. From 1535 Melanchthon ceased to believe in it. But was this sufficient? Did not the increasing immorality of the masses spring from other causes too? Did not the doctrine of justification by faith

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[39] There are numerous explanations of these matters. Cf. the recent article by Chavan, *Revue d'Histoire et de Philosophie religieuse*, Strassburg, 1924, and also t. IV of Seeberg in part.

[40] *Tischreden*, W., III, no. 3900, p. 591.

alone need modification as well? And so Melanchthon took issue with Luther on another point, and demanded a moral preparation, repentance, before the reception of the faith on the part of him who is to receive it, a repentance no longer, like that of Luther's teaching, the result of faith, but related, Melanchthon believed, to law and natural reason. Otherwise, once the faith is received, the conversion effected, what is left for the Christian to do? Must he not, in order to end the reign of sin within himself, keep on struggling at all times, that he may be sanctified? From these two ideas, repentance and sanctification, sprang a theory of Christian life which differed profoundly from the Lutheran doctrine. One entered upon this life through an act of grace. But progress was accomplished by the restoration in man of the divine image, by union with God, and by good works. And Melanchthon's ideas did not die with their author. They made their way into the Lutheran Church. They were gradually embodied in its doctrine. They were substituted for the ideas of the master.

And the latter? Within his own lifetime this work of modification, correction, and reinforcement was proceeding in the mind of his beloved disciple. Also in Melanchthon's writings, in all sorts of writings of his. Luther read them, studied them; occasionally they impressed him; and he said not a word. He who was so quick to attack anybody who disputed his position wrote none of those violent and peremptory tracts which he knew so well how to compound. One would say that he did not see, or did

not want to see. A strange spectacle: Luther saw everything and dominated a group of respectful disciples who hung on his every word. But, in his own lifetime, while he was enjoying respect and deference, a Lutheranism was forming distinct on many points from his own Lutheranism—distinct, and even opposed. And the question of Predestination versus Free Will was not immaterial or of secondary importance.

Let us look for no explanation of this strange attitude of the master, half disowned by his favorite pupil. Let us not attempt to force our way into the subterranean galleries and passages, the hiding places and retreats in which Luther's soul was at ease, a complicated soul and one itself marvelously adapted to follow the inscrutable courses leading to chaos. Let us not divert ourselves either with the classic comparison between Melanchthon and Luther, an analysis of the Melanchthonian theology as opposed to the Lutheran. What interests us in these utterances of Melanchthon is not the spectacle of a man turning little by little against another man who had first provided him with his ideas; it is not the conflict of two "great men," of two great theological luminaries. It is rather a transformation of the original conceptions of a prophet and troubadour of religion by way of adapting them to the purpose and needs of the mass of his followers. For what is the Melanchthonian theology but the adaptation of Lutheran thought to the needs of that bourgeoisie which without very much understanding had acclaimed Luther its emancipator.

Luther versus Melanchthon? No. But Luther versus the men of his time, the group influenced by the individual, individual thought influenced by collective thought. In the end a compromise, dull and lame like all compromises; viable, just because it was not the work of a theorist legislating abstractly, but born rather of experience, an experience at the same time happy and cruel.

# CHAPTER XI

## CONCLUSION

*Duæ gentes sunt in utero tuo, et duo populi ex ventre tuo dividentur.* Genesis, XXV, 23.

THE journal of Anton Lauterbach has preserved to us a rather striking table conversation. On June 27, 1538, Martin Luther dined at Wittenberg with master Philip Melanchthon. The two men were sad. They talked of the future.

"How many different masters will follow us this coming century?" asked the Doctor. "Chaos will have come again. Nobody will want to be governed by the opinion or authority of anybody else. Everybody will want to make himself his own Rabbi—look already at Osiander, Agricola . . . and how many great scandals since them, how many dissipations! It would be the best thing if the princes, by a council, should forestall such evils; but the papists would shun it: they fear the light too much!" And Philip echoed his master. "Oh," he cried in his turn, "would to God that princes and states could agree at a council on a formula to regulate doctrines and ceremonies, and prohibit anyone's deviating from it rashly to the offense of others. Yes, thrice lamentable is the aspect of

our Church, weighed down as it is by the burden of weaknesses and scandals!"

Words of defeat. But never mind Philip Melanchthon. What of Martin Luther—did he have reason to be so desolate, so despairing that night? And was he, in truth, defeated?

I

Indeed, when he glanced about him he saw more ruins than buildings. He had strewn the earth with them—colossal ruins. They were not all his work. Other rough co-workers and some who were independent, had joined forces with the general havoc of time. But how powerfully Martin Luther had wrought in the work of brutal destruction. He had banished the Pope, totally or partially, from ten countries formerly subject to him. The Emperor was reduced more and more to a purely local activity in an Empire less unified than before. Religious division was rife, as well as political and nationalistic antagonisms. Above all, the Church was in fragments, weakened in its material frame and in its spiritual functions; the old œcumenical Church was attacked and vilified, as the "papist" Church, proclaimed ineffectual, harmful, finite in its origin and structure. The priest, despoiled of his sacred character and superseded by a functionary controlled by the civil power, saw himself also expelled without honor from the old edifice of which he had provided the grandeur and the strength.

These ruins were vast. And what on the other hand

had Luther constructed? What had he erected on the conquered territory?

"Reform and Liberty!" had for years been the war cry, the rallying cry of his partisans. Reform? Luther was not a reformer. That was only too apparent. When he rose up against the Church in 1517, what did he propose? To reform Germany? To found a Lutheran Church? No. He started out, joyously, confidently, having his God within him and for him, to rediscover lost springs that no longer flowed into the church courts and convent cloisters. Like his friend the elder Cranach in his naïvely complicated pictures, he too dreamed of a Fountain of Youth. He knew where its miraculous waters gushed forth in an inexhaustible stream. He would bring all Christendom to drink.

Martin Luther had not succeeded. Of course isolated believers, and a few groups too, aggregations, peoples and states, had been won to accept him as guide and to draw water at the fountains he indicated. But was not a partial success tantamount to failure, since the innovator had been put out of the Church, excommunicated by her, while that Church, without him, in spite of him, opposing him, had continued on its course, pursuing its worldly aims by ways that were tried and tested? The traditional Church with its hierarchy, its bishops subject to the pope, its popes with their proud claim to an uninterrupted succession—it was still there, the ancient Church, standing on the same foundations. It was destined at Trent to acquire new life in its turn, to bathe in Thomism, that Thomism which

Luther instinctively abhorred as his rival and most mortal enemy. And it said to Luther, it did not fail to say: "You who pretend to be the man of God, can you prove to us that you are from Him, from Him and not the Other? Your very defeat, a partial but certain defeat, is a confession!" It was a very strong argument at that time, and one which Luther could not easily refute. For he was not a liberal protestant of our generation. To be reduced to the insignificance of a mere sectarian leader was defeat, whatever he might do or say.

Reform and Liberty. To be sure he had cast off the yoke of the pope and the Church with dramatic emphasis. He had certainly fully freed those who had followed him. But could he sing pæons of triumph if he carried in place of that heavy yoke the still heavier yoke of the prince and the State, ordained and placed in the world by God to watch over the interests, customs and dogmas even of the Christian community? Was it not his own boast that he had founded anew, more solidly than ever, the secular and temporal rule, that he had retrieved and renewed its titles, reinforcing them, so to speak with all the spiritual power of God? And as for spiritual and moral enfranchisement, greater liberty of conscience as we understand it and freedom of thought, the aging Luther of 1538, the Luther of this conversation with Master Philip, would have shuddered at the thought of claiming for man any such advantage.

Luther had met shipwreck. And we do not even ask whether, because of this failure, we have good reason to

rejoice. For in this complex and yet coherent design of the Augustinian, this attempt of his to impose on the whole Christian world, as a basis of faith, his fierce negation (so shocking at the period of the Renaissance to many minds, which contact with the ancients had inclined towards a humanism worthy of the name), a stubborn and furious negation of all human dignity, worth, and greatness except what accrued from divine grace, this impassioned insistence on the impotence of the will, which antagonized not only Erasmus but many independent thinkers of the day, from Rabelais to Giordano Bruno and Campanella, this attempt of a Christian who was purely Christian to rebuild the Christian unity on new foundations and to impose a creed incompatible with all that the chosen few were beginning to cherish, defend, and promote—what was all this, in fact, but anachronistic illusion, useful only for the diversion in his hours of insomnia of a monk out of touch with his age?

II

Let us not celebrate too triumphantly our victory over this antiquated and decrepit windmill. Let us simply recall in connection with Luther his own distinction, by which he set so much store, between the earthly realm and the kingdom on high, the hereafter, the spiritual order.

On the earthly plane Luther seems to be at a loss, because, like the believer whose ideal portrait he painted,

he was not whole-souledly interested in what went on there. He was inclined to take little interest in material victories. He moved in the world as the actor moves amid stage scenery. He went about with perfect insouciance and spiritual detachment.

What he left behind him on earth was a mocking counterfeit of the edifice that a fair architect, inspired with Luther's ideas and believing in his task, convinced of the need of building a beautiful and durable work, might easily have erected on the soil laid waste by the powerful hand of revolt. The institutional Lutheranism, with its flaws and weaknesses, as it was realized in Germany in the late sixteenth century and early seventeenth century, under the direction of paltry and fatuous princes and the mechanical control of the bureaucracy, with its dogmas learnedly polished and repolished by the microscopic talent of sedulous theologians—to say that this Lutheranism was a betrayal of the man of Worms, the author of the great writings of 1520, is not enough. It would have covered him with shame, if it had not been almost entirely foreign to him.

But there is the domain of the Spirit, the other sphere. And this Luther, having none of the interest in permanence which impels the builder to have engraved, without too much irony, on the portal of a solid house the old bourgeois couplet:

*"Stet domus haec, donec fluctus formica marinos*
*Ebibat, et totum testudo perambulet orbem"*—

this Luther was, instead, the first in date, the most lively if not the most fertile, of that intermittent succession of heroic geniuses, philosophers and poets, musicians and prophets, who, although they have not always expressed their tumultuous desires, their aspirations at once strong and confused, and the restlessness of souls incapable of decision, in the language of sound, deserve none the less to be known as musical geniuses. The old Germany gave them to the world, and in their works, which are as luxuriant as the forests of legendary Germany, now illuminated with rays of golden light, now immersed in impenetrable shadow, she discovers with pride the eternal aspects of her hungry nature, a childish voracity, never ceasing to accumulate for its own gratification wealth and recognition of all sorts, but indifferent to order or system.

Was Luther one of the progenitors of the modern world? The French bandy that formula about, or others of like resonance. If we remember how involuntary this paternity was and how little the ill-favored urchin realized its progenitor's wishes, we can adopt the expression if we wish and apply it in a limited sense. Luther did in fact, by living, speaking, and being himself, create a great many situations productive of spiritual or moral consequences that he had not foreseen. For having produced the schism without reëstablishing unity, enfeebled and diminished the Catholic Church, created conditions favorable to the birth of innumerable sects, provoked discussion by laymen of religious questions, and exposed the Bible to curious eyes—for all these and many other things,

the reformer surely deserves the gratitude of men whom he never ceased to combat and detest. His enabling Bossuet in particular, but many others too, to write, each in his own way, *l'Histoire des Variations*, is perhaps his title to glory. It is certainly one of those stupendous ironies peculiar to history. The venerable Proudhon laughs somewhere at those Abyssinians who, "afflicted with tapeworm, cut off some part of themselves, but were always careful to keep their heads." In such terms, with his piquancy, the cooper's son of the rue du Petit-Battant was pleased to show us Martin Luther. And the opening is favorable to the remark that one may not accord fair play to the critical spirit, that to reply to criticism in the terms of criticism is like taking a spiritual incendiary into one's house, a species of madness. He is right. And one can as well subscribe today as in 1853 to the conclusions of *La Révolution Sociale démontrée par le coup d'État du Deux-Décembre*. The form is archaic, it may be; but Proudhon's striking phrase is apt: "Religion, for us, is the archæology of reason," and in proportion to our perception of its aptness we shall hail Luther as a precursor—however involuntary. And we can, we must, do even more.

Lutheran Germany, in centuries past, the Germany of the official theologians and pastors in the pay of the principalities, was able for years to ignore Luther almost completely and convey to the world that she had nothing in common, really nothing, with the magnificent idealism, the passionate feeling, the living faith of the unshackled Christian of 1520. The spirit of Luther continued none

the less to brood over German waters. And is there in fact any fundamental fact of German history, in the broadest sense of the word history, is there any significant manifestation of German thought and feeling, to phrase it differently, which is not illuminated for us by the knowledge, however slight, of the work, doctrine and intimate faith of the prophet of Worms? But how brilliantly in their turn do these facts and these manifestations explain Luther to us?

III

We say: "See that man. So well equipped as a thinker, so ill-suited for action! When he tried to scale the heavens, two or three contemptible mole-hills tripped him up and left him struggling, helpless and awkward." A private misfortune apparently, a casual misadventure. But was Luther the only German here who could not bring his revolution to a successful issue? The expression *mener à bien* is thoroughly French. What meaning can it have for a German, if in fact revolutions in Germany are always individual, if the heroes who sire them never condescend to supply the world with the "encumbering and lifeless structures," but leave that work to masons, contractors and architectural advisers accountable to and directed by pastors and princes,—if they are, in fact, content to do so, since free spirits have nothing to do with such menial efforts. It suffices for them, it more than suffices for them, to conquer, seize and appropriate to themselves their revolutionary truth, to wield their personal

and individual force against the ruinous older order of things, driven as they are by the explosive violence of their sincerity; it suffices for them to leave the mass laboring at humble tasks, while they enter spiritually into direct communion with the Divine. It is not only Luther that turns away from other exertions. "To what end?" they all cry. "When one has drunk the strong wine of the absolute, what matters these insipid mundane vintages?"

Let us keep that in mind, if we would understand. In its plain, precise and uniform divisions, the yardstick is adequate to our logician's tastes. Is it adequate, though, to measure those subtle proportions that old architects, ignoring such common scales, measured and established with other instruments? Let us cease to look down on these German revolutionaries because of what seem to us their defeats, their ineffectuality in action—their ill-starred constituent assemblies, their futile conventions. Rather let us remember the figure of Faust anathematizing all honors and dignities, bringing all illusions into the light of day, and condemning those things in which man exults —wives and children, servants, ploughshares, Mammon crouching over his gold, love which transports, and even hope, faith and suffering. He rejects worldly happiness; he shatters the Universe with his implacable fist, to restore it again, to build it nearer to the heart's desire; and the Spirits, who observe the drama with terror, bear away the fragments of a world and drop them into the void. Men on the earth, however, unmindful of these spiritual

catastrophes, continued sheep-like in their usual rounds, guided by the mandates of their revered superiors.

For this is the second aspect of the matter. While these heroic geniuses disregarded the soil or deigned to confide their bodies alone to its keeping, while their souls plumbed the empyrean, the shepherds with their watch dogs were inheriting the earth. These commanded, directed and governed. They directed operations, *their* operations. The crowds surrendered docilely and marched to their drums. They lent themselves, without resistance or eagerness, to the imposed discipline. They took their places methodically in the pattern of a visible Church, which was closely related to the State. The State lent its force to the Church, and the Church, in turn, imparted to the State its character of a divine institution, founded and arrayed by God's direct act, which one could not and must not thereafter resist. That is Luther, and that, too, is Germany from Luther's to our own day. But, with all this complex of facts, ideas, feelings, how, exactly, did Germany influence Luther, and, inversely, Luther Germany?

"Lutheranism," it has been said, "is a conception of life. And a study of the whole of German life is necessary to its understanding." That is true. Luther is, if you will, one of the fathers of the world and of the modern spirit. Doubtless also one of the fathers of the German world and German mind in so far, be it understood, as there is "a" German mind, as well as "a modern mind."

On that twenty-seventh of June, 1538, Philip Melanch-

thon had a right to lament, as a humanist, nurtured on the classics and sustaining himself perforce through the long Saxon winters by such sunlight as he might derive from old Hellas, a moderate man as he was, one for whom the word reason retained all its meaning. But Luther—he was wrong to give way, to repeat words that any of his friends, or even his enemies, might have said naturally and without violence. He was wrong, as he so often was, in permitting the man in him to speak, the gross man living a bourgeois life in a bourgeois house in Wittenberg. This man, perhaps, had the right to be sad. But not the prophet. For he was not mistaken: there is no tariff on ideas and thought is free. Ideas are intangible and essentially indestructible.

Luther had sown enough ideas throughout Germany so that he might count on a large survival. What mattered the Church of Saxony with its dogmas and pastors, its temples and rites, in comparison with the magnificent posterity the idealist of 1520 was to see nursing at the breast of his country? Magnificent, and sometimes alarming. For, not Master Philip, whom Luther describes to us as always preoccupied with the fate of Empires and with heavy problems of statecraft, but Luther himself, who was interested only in himself, in his conscience and his salvation, was eventually to have an effect on statecraft that was unforeseen and yet logical. A powerful effect, certainly. Was it to promote the peace of mankind and the welfare of the world? That is another question, and, one that does not here concern us.

Let us not judge Luther. For which Luther could it be? Or by what code—his or ours? Or by the standards of contemporary Germany? Let us simply project right down to the present day, so difficult to appraise, the sinuous ramifications of a posthumous influence.

# BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

The bibliography of Luther is an ocean. Bœhmer in 1906 said 2,000 volumes, not counting articles, brochures, etc. Since that the flood has risen tremendously. How is one to escape drowning? The specialists can manage; this note is not meant for them. It contains elementary suggestions on the editions and translations of Luther's works, and an indication of the works really essential to one beginning the study.

## *I. The Works of Luther*

A) *Complete Works.*

There are seven editions. For practical purposes only a couple of the later ones need be referred to, say the Erlangen and the Weimar.

The *Erlangen edition* was completed a long time ago. The studies previous to 1890 referred to it exclusively, and, the Weimar edition being unfinished, many Lutheran writings still quote from it. It includes:

a) 67 tomes in 8vo of works in German: *"Dr. M. Luthers Sämmtliche Werke";* t. I, 1826; t. LXVII*b*, 1857 (ts. I to XX and XXIV to XXVI in the second edition, 1862-1880 and 1883-1885). Ts. XXIV-XXXII contain historic texts in German relative to the Reformation; ts. LIII-LVI, the letters in German; ts. LVII-LXII, the Table Talk.—Ts. LXVI-LXVII, indexes.

b) 33 tomes in 8vo of works in Latin: *"Lutheri Opera,"* ts. I-XXIII, *Opera exegetica;* ts. XXIV-XXVI, *Commentaria in Epistolum ad Galatos;* t. XXVII-XXXIII, *Opera ad Reformationis historiam pertinentia,* edition Schmidt, 1865-1873.

The *Weimar Edition: Dr. M. Luthers Werke, Kritische Gesamtausgabe,* t. I, 1883, comprises about 80 big volumes in quarto. The

absence of indexes, even partial ones, renders the material still rather inaccessible. They are arranged chronologically; the works confided to specialists are accompanied by bibliographies, notes, reproductions, etc., of uneven value. In 1927, about 60 volumes had appeared, not counting Luther's *Bible* (5 vol.: I, 1906; V, 1914) or the *Tischreden* (6 vol., by Kroker, 1912-1921; index in t. VI; an excellent working instrument, which completely renews the aspect of the *Tischreden*).

B) *Luther's Correspondence.*

The Enders Edition, *Luthers Briefwechsel,* 18 vol. in 12mo (1884-1923, ts. I to XI by Enders, XII to XVI by Kawerau, XVII and XVIII by Flemming and Albrecht) would relegate all preceding ones if Enders had reproduced the letters in German in the first eleven volumes, instead of quoting them and referring, for the text, to the editions of De Wette (*Luthers Briefe, Sendschreiben und Bedenken,* 5 vol., Berlin, 1825-1828, plus one suppl. by Seidemann, 1856) and Irmischer (part of Erlanger, 4 vol., ts. LIII-LVI of the general classification, 1853-1856, gives only the German letters).

C) *Selected Works, Separate Editions, Translations.*

There are many collections of selected works of Luther addressed to different publics. The *Luthers Werke für d. Christliche,* 2nd ed., Berlin, 1905, 8 vol., plus 2 suppl., by Scheel, stand well at the head of the published works; the *Luthers Werke in Auswahl* of O. Clemen (Bonn, 4 vol., 1912-1913) appeal to a more studious public.

There are numerous editions of separate works. We shall point out only that of 1515-1516 on the Epistle to the Romans, by Ficker: *Luthers Vorlesung, über den Römerbrief,* Leipzig, 1908, 8vo (definitive edition to appear in the Weimar collection).

In French: *Les Memoires de Luther* by Michelet (1st ed., 1835, 2 in 8°) are an intelligent choice of letters and table talk.—The little volume by Goguel, *Luther,* in the collection of the *Cent Chefs-d'œuvre étrangers* (Renaissance du Livre, 1926) gives several too brief extracts from the great works; the biographical in-

troduction is not up to date.—F. Kuhn has translated the letter *A la noblesse Chretienne de la Nation Allemande,* Paris, 1879.—Horning has translated *le Grand Catéchisme de Luther,* 1854; Meyhoffer, the *Lettre pour l'établissement d'écoles chrétiennes in Les Idées pédagogiques de Luther,* a thesis of Lausanne, 1909. For other older translations of the works or fragments, cf. Paquier in: *Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique,* t. IX, 1926, col. 1331-1333.

O. Scheel has published a valuable little volume, *Dockumente zur Luthers Entwicklung bis* 1519 (Tübingen, Mohr, 1911).—A good selection of iconographic documents in Schreckenbach and Neubert's *M. Luther,* 1st edition, Leipzig, 1916; 3d ed., 1921.

## II. *Works About Luther*

A very good analytical bibliography of Luther in t. II, 1st part of Gustav Wolf's *Quellenkunde der deutschen Reformationsgeschichte,* Gotha, Perthes, 1916 (pp. 167-276). Cf. also Dahlmann-Waitz *Quellenkunde der deutschen Geschichte,* 8th ed., 1910.

### *Works Previous to* 1900

The importance of these books is beginning to be merely historic and retrospective. I cite only the following:

*Deutsche Geschichte im Zeitalter der Reformation,* by Ranke (Berlin, 6 vol., 8vo, 1839-1847).—*Geschichte des Deutschen Volkes seit dem Ausgang des Mittelalters,* by Janssen (1st edition, 1878 sqq.); 14th, revised by Pastor, 1897-1904; 8 vol.; a mediocre French translation by Paris: *L'Allemagne et la Réforme,* Paris, 1887 sqq.). *Geschichte der Deutschen Reformation* by F. von Bezold (Coll. Oncken, 883 pages, 8vo, 1886-1890, without notes).—An essential monograph by J. Köstlin, *M. Luther, sein Leben und seine Schriften,* 1st ed., 2 vol., 1875; 5th, revised by Kawerau, 1903; classic picture of Luther previous to 1900. F. Kuhn, *Luther, sa vie, son œuvre* (3 vol., 1883-1884): a good picture of the traditional Luther; numerous quotations translated. Monograph by A. Thoma, *Katherina von Bora,* 1900. Th. Harneck, *Luthers Theologie,* 2 vol., 1862-1886. Köstlin, *Luthers Theologie in ihrer Geschichtlichen Entwickelung,* 1st ed., 2 vol., 1863; 3rd ed., 1901. Schwalb, *Luther, ses*

*opinions religieuses et sociales pendant la première période de la Réformation,* a theological thesis, Strassburg, 1866. Kuhn, *Le Christianisme de Luther* (*Revue Chrétienne,* XLVIII, 1900).

*Works Since* 1900

The bibliography by G. Wolf, cited above.—A short treatise by L. Febvre, *Le progrès récent des études sur Luther, Revue d'Histoire Moderne,* no. 1, 1926.—*Bulletins périodiques* by Stern in the *Revue historique* (t. LXXXII, 1903; t. XCII, 1906; t. CII, 1909; t. CXV, 1910; t. CXXXII, 1919).

a) On his milieu.

Monographs, many of them on the problem presented by Troeltsch (*Die Bedeutung des Protestantismus für die Enstehung der modernen Welt,* 1911) and taken up in the *Soziallehren der Christlichen Kirchen und Gruppen* by the same author (1909). Exposition of the ideas of Troeltsch by Vermeil, *Revue d'Histoire et Philosophie religieuse,* Strassburg, 1921. Compare his ideas with those of a pure historian, G. von Below: *Die Ursachen der Reformation* (Histor. Bibliothek of Oldenburg, no. 38, 1917).—Sohm, *Kirchenrecht,* t. I, 1892 (*Handbuch d. deutschen Rechtswissenschaft,* Binding, VIII).—Ricker, *Die rechtliche Stellung der evangelischen Kirche Deutschlands in ihrer geschichtl. Entwicklung,* Leipzig, 1893. The same, a more recent article, *Histor. Vierteljahrschrift of* 1898, translated by Choisy: *L'idée de l'État et de l'Église chez les théologiens et juristes luthériens,* 1900. G. von Below, *Die Bedeutungen der Reformation für die pol. Entwicklung,* Leipzig, 1918.—In French, G. de Lagarde, *Recherches sur l'Esprit politique de la Réforme,* Paris, 1926, gives much praise to Luther. The special number of the *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale* given over to the Reformation (fourth centenary, 1917) contains the already dying echo of the controversies excited by these publications.

b) The man and his work.

First, Denifle, *Luther und Luthertum in der ersten Entwickelung,* t. I, 1st and 2nd parts, Mainz, 1904, 8°; 2nd ed, 1904-1906.—T. II, posthumous, edited by P. Weiss, Mainz, 1905.

An intelligent little book by Bœhmer, *Luther in Lichte der neueren Forschung,* first published in the Teubner collection *Aus Natur und Geisteswelt* (1st ed., 1906). The 4th ed., 1917, aided in the work of reconstruction which followed the ruinous attack by Denifle.

Two other great works cover the activities of Catholics and Protestants of this troubled period. P. Grisar (S. J.), in three large volumes, rounded off intelligently Denifle's enterprise: I. *Luthers Werden; Grundlegung der Spaltung bis* 1530, Fribourg, 1911, bibliography; II. *Auf der Höhe des Lebens,* 1911; III. *Am Ende der Bahn,* 1912, chronological tables, index.—The Lutheran theologian O. Scheel has given us the two first volumes of *M. Luther, vom Katholizismus zur Reformation,* which will number four (I, *Auf der Schule und Universität,* 1916, 8vo; II, *Im Kloster,* 1917) *and* have been described above as replacing the classic work by Köstlin.

c) His doctrine.

We have spoken of the importance of Ficker's discovery. The best works which take account of this are: O. Ritschl, the *Dogmengeschichte des Protestantismus,* which treats of much outside of Lutheranism: I. *Biblizismus und Traditionalismus,* Leipzig, 1908; II. *Die Theologie der deutschen Reformation,* Leipzig, 1912; III. *Die reformierte Theologie des 16 und 17 Jahrh.,* Göttingen, 1926; IV. *Das orthodoxe Luthertum im gegensatz zu der reformierten Theologie und in der Auseinandersetzung mit dem Synkretismus.* Books hard to read, badly informed in foreign literature, but presenting a good picture of the doctrinal history of the Reformation. —Seeberg, *Die Lehre Luthers,* presents a good historical exposition of the Lutheran doctrine (Leipzig, 1917 and 1920, 2 in 8vo).

In French, the book by Abbé Cristiani, *Du Luthéranisme au Protestantisme, Evolution de Luther de* 1517 *à* 1528, is a noteworthy effort. The recent article, *Luther,* by Vacant and Mangenot, in the *Dictionnaire de Théologie catholique* (t. IX, 1926), assembled by the Canon Paquier, an adapter of Denifle, exhibits Catholic antipathies, but is informative.—From the Protestant point of view there is the interesting thesis by A. Jundt, *Le développement de la pensée religieuse de Luther jusqu'en* 1517, Paris, 1905, 8vo.—A meaty and

instructive work by H. Strohl, in two parts: I. *L'évolution religieuse de Luther jusqu'en* 1515, Strassburg, 1922 (Theological Thesis); II. *L'épanouissement de la pensée religieuse de Luther de* 1515 *à* 1520, 1924.—There is also a suggestive monograph by R. Will, *La liberté chrétienne, étude sur le principe de la piété chez Luther,* Strassburg, 1922.

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